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IN LONDON'S HEART

IN LONDON'S HEART

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS

AUTHOR OF

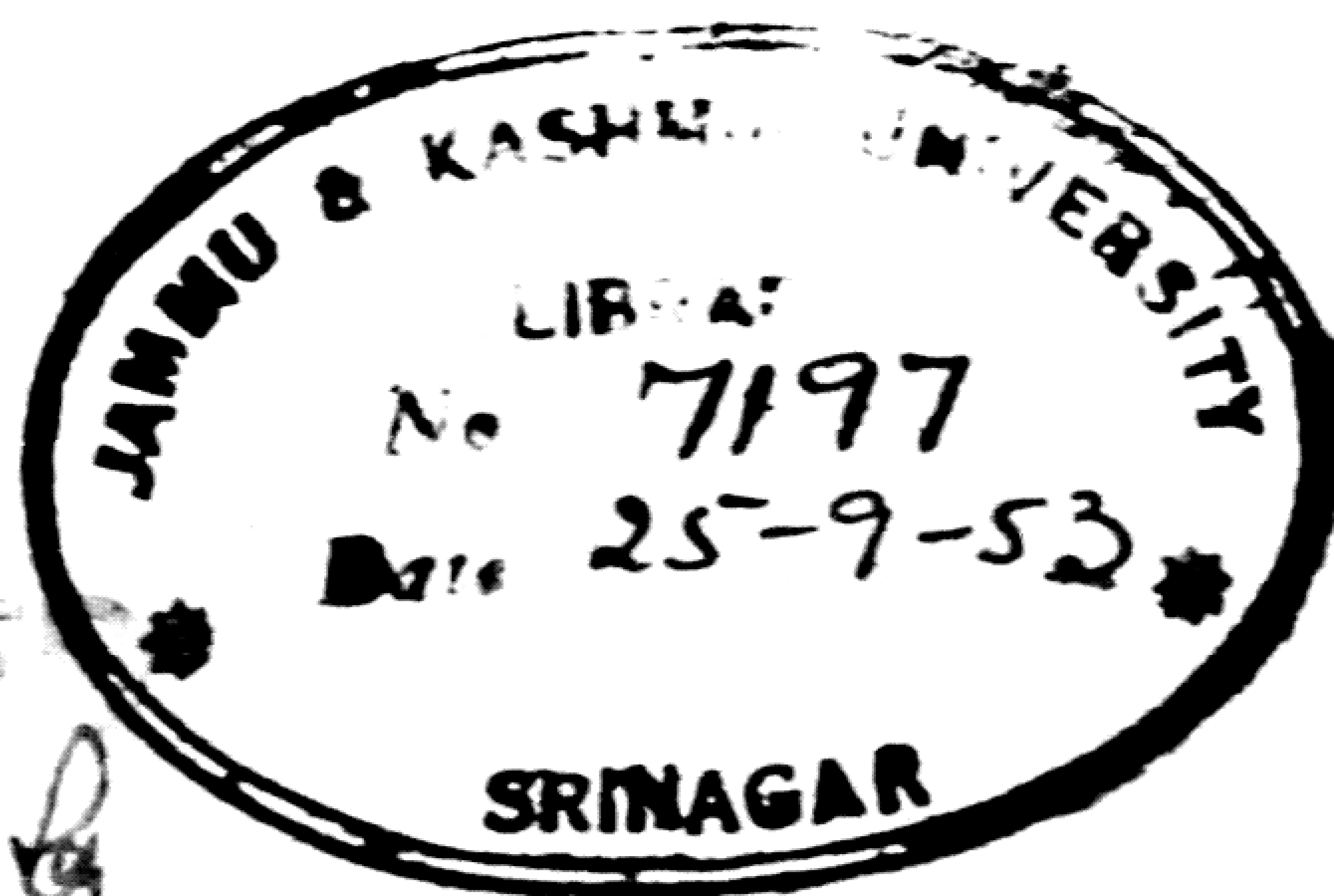
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IN LONDON'S HEART

CHAPTER I

FROM PORTLAND TO PICCADILLY

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and a thin haze which had hung over London through the October afternoon had lifted, and the night was bright and exhilarating. The working day was over. The shop-assistants, glad to escape from their monotonous toil, were pouring into the streets. Streams of pleasure-seekers were walking towards the great centre of theatrical entertainment, and smart little broughams, with ladies and gentlemen in evening dress, were dashing along as fast as the plague of omnibuses would allow them.

Outside one of the most fashionable restaurants in Piccadilly, the big foreigner in uniform who has taken the place of the English commissionaire was preparing to receive company. He had been lolling in an easy attitude against the door-post, reading a pink "extra special" until the clock struck eight, but now he had begun to assume an important, not to say dictatorial, attitude towards the crawling hansoms and four-wheelers which seemed to him to be blocking the way.

"'Igher up there! 'igher up!" he exclaimed, as a cabman on the look-out for a fare stopped just in front.

And the cabman, gazing at him contemptuously, replied, "Don't *you* get no 'igher up, guv'nor—if you do, you'll fall off!"

The remark was enigmatical, but it sounded sarcastic, and the cabman, chuckling at his own repartee, made a

communication to a brother Jehu in the cabman's language of signs—by no means to be confused with the 'busmen's pantomime, which is totally different, and depends more upon the movements of the elbow—and drove on.

Shortly after eight, carriages and hansoms began to roll up to the entrance of the restaurant, and the gold-laced official swelled at least two inches, as he imperiously regulated the traffic. Home-returning shop-girls, as they passed the brightly lighted, brilliantly decorated entrance, stopped for a minute or two to look at the elegantly dressed women who stepped from the carriages, and were escorted by their attendant cavaliers into the restaurant, which was for the time being patronised by the fashion and wealth of London.

A good-looking, pale-faced man of about five-and-forty, with the white tie of evening dress showing under a somewhat worn overcoat, stood for a moment among the crowd. But while the people about him were fixing their attention on the dresses, the theatre cloaks, and the jewels of the ladies, he was eagerly scanning the faces of the men.

"Nobody that I know," he muttered to himself, "and if there had been, I suppose it wouldn't have been much use—they'd only have insulted me." He heaved a deep sigh and turned away.

He walked along the busy thoroughfare with the air of a man who has no object in view. He walked slowly, for he was wondering where he should go and what he should do. At the corner of the Circus he stopped and looked at the contents bills of the evening papers spread out in the road, and splashed with the mud of the passing traffic.

The headlines were large, startling, and various. There was a great victory of British troops somewhere on the African coast and capture of a savage king's capital. That had no interest for him, for he had no particular reason to be patriotic. There was a sensational murder, but that did not excite his imagination. He had had too many horrors in his own life to want to read about tragedies that happened to other people. There was a panic on the Stock Exchange, but what interest could that have

to a man whose sole earthly possessions were the clothes in which he stood, and a shabby serge suit hanging behind the door in the mean little bedroom for which he owed a fortnight's rent?

But there was a line on one of the bills which *did* interest him. It was this: "An Epidemic of Suicide." He read that line and repeated it aloud to himself.

Suicide! It seemed as though the glaring contents bill lying in the mud of the busy London street had been placed there as a friendly hint. He laughed aloud. It wasn't a pleasant laugh, and the crowd of men and women waiting for the 'buses to take them to their homes turned and stared at him.

"Suicide!" he thought to himself—"Yes, that is the one solution of the difficulty. There's no chance for me in the world to-day, for I can't earn a farthing anywhere. But at least I can contribute to the newspaper literature of to-morrow. It will make a startling little paragraph. 'A gentleman in evening dress found in the Thames.' They don't get an evening-dress corpse every day. I wonder if I could sell the details beforehand to the *Star* or the *Evening News*, and get a dinner with the money? It would be worth a guinea, and I could dine sumptuously in fashionable society and have a good time for the last. It would be better than dying with the hunger-pain gnawing at you and making you weak and milksoppish. But I suppose no editor would buy—he'd send for a policeman!"

A York and Albany omnibus came up, and there was a rush for the vacant seats. The man who was contemplating suicide so cynically was pushed aside, and to get clear of the jostling crowd he stepped back and leant against a shop window. A short, thick-set man in a pea-jacket, with a slouch hat well drawn over his eyes, and a muffler round his neck, who had been watching him for a minute or two, stepped up beside him and touched him on his elbow.

"You're togged up so I hardly knew you, mate. What's *your* lay now, Steve Alison?"

The gentleman in evening dress started and stared at the man who had intruded on his reverie.

"Don't recognise me, do you, mate? Well, I hardly

knew *you* at first—with that moustache. Take you long to grow it after you left?"

Stephen Alison frowned, and his pale face grew paler still. He had recognised the man who called him "mate"—they had worked side by side when both wore the broad arrow of the convict. The man was no "companion in misfortune," but a criminal of the worst type—a notorious housebreaker, who had spent half his life in Her Majesty's gaols.

Stephen, terrified at what the man, who was slightly the worse for liquor, might say, moved away to a part of the street where there were fewer people.

The man followed him. "It's all right, mate," he said, "there ain't no 'narks' about. Bless you, I know 'em all. I thought it was only right to pass the time o' day to an old pal. You didn't know me till I spoke, did you?"

"No."

"Ah, you see, I has to be careful not to go about standing for my fortergraf, so to speak, now. The beastly newspapers get interviewing the police nowadays, and I'm finding as it ain't all beer and skittles to be a celebrity. Why, my missis was reading out to me the other day that one o' the expertest and most daring burglars in London was called the Dook, on account of his resemblance to the late Dook of Wellington; and she says to me, 'Bill, if I didn't know as you was a travellin' jeweller, and that's what's kept you away from 'ome all over the the country, I'm sure I should say that was you, for you're just like the portraits of the Dook as I've seen on the knife-polish advertisements.'"

"Ah," said Alison impatiently, "very funny. But I'll say good night. I'm in a hurry."

"All right—but look 'ere—I didn't speak to you, mate, just out o' idle cur'osity. I've got a big job comin' on, and you're just the chap as me and my mate, Joe Huggett, have been looking for—you remember Joe, he got his brief just afore I did. It's easy work—you won't have to soil your hands—only look a toff and see a gent home to his front door, and help him to put his latch-key in. Oh, it's a pretty job, I tell you—all thought out beautiful—and there'll be the finest lot of swag to cut up that's been copped for many a day."

The Duke had taken hold of Alison's arm, and was whispering confidentially in his ear. Alison, irritated and indignant, drew himself hastily away, and the two men separated. Then the Duke looked across the road and saw that Sergeant Verity, a plain clothes officer well known to the thieves of London, was looking in at a tobacconist's window.

"Oh," said the Duke to himself, "Alison twigged him, I suppose, and didn't want to be seen talking to me. He's green at the game, or he wouldn't have cut off like that. The 'tec'll think there was something up."

He pulled his hat further over his eyes, and in a moment had disappeared in the crowd.

Stephen Alison, a man of good birth and education—a gentleman, as the phrase goes—had in one mad moment yielded to the temptation which had eventually brought him to the Old Bailey. Leading the life of a country gentleman, married to a good woman, the father of a little girl whom he adored, he found himself suddenly—owing to the treachery and dishonesty of his twin brother—reduced from affluence to poverty.

John and Stephen Alison, though so alike in form and feature that when they grew up to be men one wore his beard and the other only a moustache in order to avoid the constant mistakes which people made with regard to them, were totally diverse in disposition and in tastes.

Their father, a prosperous City merchant, early discovered that John's tastes were for a business career, and Stephen's for an outdoor country life. So John was taken into the office in the City, and Stephen—his father's favourite—was allowed to follow the bent of his own inclination, and received a handsome allowance.

When old Mr. Alison died, it was found that the business had been left entirely to the management of John, but Stephen and his sister, who was unmarried, were to have a large share of the profits.

For several years the business apparently prospered in the hands of John Alison. Stephen, on his share of the profits, was able to surround his wife and child with all the luxuries of a rich man's home, and his life was without a cloud. Then suddenly came the bolt from the blue. John Alison, who had been bitten by the mania

for outside speculation, first of all drained the resources of the business, using the money of his brother and sister without their consent, and then lost everything. Crippled for capital, the house of Alison & Company, during a period of panic, was unable to weather the storm, and John Alison, fearing, it was presumed, to face the discovery of his treachery in using the capital of his relatives for his private speculations, took possession of all the available cash he could lay his hands on, and left the country without troubling to inform any one of his destination.

An investigation showed that the business, if carefully wound up, would just pay twenty shillings in the pound to the trade creditors, but the result was ruin to Stephen and his sister. The sister died of a broken heart from the shock, but Stephen, finding that his home was still left and the creditors would not come upon the two or three thousand pounds he had saved out of his yearly income, set about thinking how he could still continue to live in the style to which he had been accustomed. He would not have cared so much for himself, but the thought of taking his wife and his little girl from their home, and depriving them of the luxuries to which they had been accustomed, cut him to the quick.

Instead of facing the situation bravely, he did as many a man in his position has done—put off the evil day in the hope of getting rid of it altogether. He kept on his pretty country house, and his wife's maid, his daughter's governess, his horses, and his daughter's pony.

But that sort of thing can't be done on the yearly income derived from a few thousand pounds, and so Stephen drew out his money and gambled with it. He was a good judge of a horse, he had followed racing as a pastime, and he knew a number of racing men. And so he turned to the Turf to recoup him for the losses he had sustained by his brother's failure in the City. But ill-fortune followed him, and the man, grown desperate, grew unscrupulous. He became leagued with a set of men of shady character, whose business it is to prey upon the rich young fools who, in the first flush of inherited wealth, rush to the Turf as an amusement.

His principal associate was a young man named Darvell,

a handsome, impecunious adventurer, who lived by his wits and was practically a blackleg. Stephen Alison, being known on the Turf as a gentleman, was able to inspire confidence where Darvell and his associates would have failed—where they had failed.

In desperate straits to save his home from being swept away, and his wife and child reduced to the mean surroundings which he dreaded, Stephen Alison consented to carry through a transaction for Darvell and his associates. He carried it through, and fell a victim to it.

By a clever trick several bills were obtained from a young nobleman, who was gambling madly and drinking heavily. These were drawn by Alison and discounted through a money-lender's agent named Gaygold, who was introduced to Alison by Darvell. But when the bills became due the young man had come to his senses, declared that they had been obtained by fraud, and that one of them, for a large amount, was a forgery.

The money-lender brought an action, but the young nobleman's plea of fraud and forgery succeeded, and in consequence of the verdict Stephen Alison was arrested. Alison had had his share of the money, had drawn the bills and obtained the signature to them, and to him the proceeds had been handed by Gaygold.

He recoiled from the idea of betraying his confederates, and stood his trial alone. For the fraud and the forgery, of which he was considered to be the sole author, he was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

His wife, left penniless and heartbroken at her husband's fall, found a home with her elder brother, Captain Halford, a widower with one son, who lived in a quiet village in Cumberland. Mrs. Alison wrote to her husband in prison. The little girl had been kept in ignorance of her father's fate, and in their quiet retreat no one had identified her with the man who had been convicted of the great Turf Fraud.

Stephen Alison wrote back to his wife a manly, penitent letter. He told her that he would make the only atonement possible, and one to which for the sake of the daughter they both loved it was her duty to consent. He could never again be of use to them or help them. He was a marked man henceforward, and on his release from

prison it would be impossible for him to regain a respectable position. He desired, therefore, that from that time he should be a stranger to them. Let May be told in time that her father was dead. On his release he would not try to see them, and he would never claim either his wife or child again.

Captain Halford, who saw his brother-in-law's letter, insisted on his sister's agreeing to this life-long separation. It was her duty to do so for the sake of May, who when her father came out would be a young woman. For Mrs. Alison to return to her husband, an ex-convict, would be to ruin her daughter's chance of happiness in life. And Mrs. Alison yielded to her husband and her brother, and for her daughter's sake reluctantly consented.

. . . .

And now Stephen Alison was once more a free man. He had served the major portion of his sentence, and had been released on a ticket-of-leave. But he had been out of prison for nearly a month, and the last farthing of the small sum he had received on leaving had gone. His first chance to earn the money of which he stood so sorely in need had been offered him by a notorious criminal, a wretch by whose side he had worked in the quarries of Portland.

CHAPTER II

A FASHIONABLE RESTAURANT

STEPHEN ALISON walked back again up Piccadilly, and once more stopped in front of the restaurant. The idea of suicide was still in his mind, but he had a curious longing to dine for the last time with well-dressed men and women. He was in evening dress because this had been an idea of his when he first came out of prison. He was a man with odd ideas, and this was one of them.

He spent some of the money he received from a charitable society on his release in the suit he wore. He had bought it second-hand and cheap. He thought that

it would perhaps enable him to go to the places where he had been known in his better days, and meeting some of his old associates there, they might help him to make a fresh start. But his courage had failed him at the first attempt. He had gone into a West End bar, where some of the men he had associated with on the Turf were in the habit of meeting at night, and had been so coldly received that he had retired shamed and broken-hearted.

Since that he had tried his best to obtain employment, but had failed. He was still a ticket-of-leave man, and gradually he had discovered that the only chance of "living"—as he understood the term—was for him to associate with the blacklegs and card-sharpers known as "the boys." This he would not do, and now at the end of his slender resources, owing two weeks' rent for his room, penniless, hungry, and friendless in the great City, he had determined to end his troubles in the river.

But the idea of dining first, and dining well, haunted him. He couldn't bring himself to give it up. After all, what did it matter that he hadn't any money? He looked a gentleman, he was dressed like one. He could order his dinner, and there would be no trouble until the bill was presented. But before that he would be able to escape. His overcoat would be hanging up. If he got up from the table and put on his hat, he might be going into the hall to buy a flower. Instead of that, he could go into the street and make the best of his way to the Thames. It would be a cold walk, but that wouldn't matter. The river would end it all.

Having made up his mind, Stephen Alison walked into the restaurant, sat down at a vacant table, and was at once attended to by the polite manager, with whose assistance he selected a perfect little dinner from the *menu*. To cheer himself up he ordered a bottle of champagne with it. Then he looked round the restaurant. The company was a brilliant one. He saw around him men and women whose movements are discussed daily in the society gossip of the Press.

Suddenly his eyes were riveted on the face of a gentleman who was dining with a party—four ladies and three men besides himself—at a table at the top of the room. One of the gentlemen, a young fellow of about six-and-

twenty, who was talking to a handsome, showy woman, blazing with diamonds, looked up and noticed the stare.

"By Jove, Darvell," he exclaimed, "that fellow's looking at you as if he'd seen a ghost. Do you know him?"

Mr. Darvell, the gentleman addressed, turned his eyes in the direction indicated by his friend, and looked at Alison steadfastly.

"No," he said, "I don't think I do—there's something about his face that seems familiar though. But he *is* staring."

"Perhaps it's somebody you owe a bit of the old to, Jack," said the lady with the diamonds.

Jack Darvell smiled. "No, I don't think so," he replied. "Most of the people I owed money to turned up, my dear, when they heard I'd married you. I never understood what a serious business it was having one's address in the Post-Office Directory till then."

The company laughed at Jack Darvell's remarks. They all knew that before he married Pretty Molly Mallandaine—widow of young Mr. George Mallandaine, who died in a private lunatic asylum at the age of twenty-four—he had not always been particularly prompt in settling with his creditors. They knew, in fact, that his past had been not altogether a reputable one.

But when handsome Jack Darvell married the widow, who had been a music-hall star, and was reported to have saved a good round sum out of her pin-money, besides having secured a very fine collection of diamonds from her wealthy young husband before he drank himself into the lunatic asylum, everybody looked upon him as a man released from pecuniary embarrassments and comfortably settled in life.

"Perhaps he's struck with your beauty, Mrs. Darvell," said the young man who had first spoken.

"Or your diamonds," said Jack Darvell. "Perhaps he's a jewel thief taking stock for future operations."

"O Jack, don't!" exclaimed Molly. "I'm always dreaming that somebody's breaking in and coming after my jewellery—I shan't sleep a wink all night."

Stephen Alison, finding that he had attracted the attention of the party, lowered his eyes and poured himself

out a glass of champagne. He drank it, and, beckoning the waiter, asked for a lead pencil and an envelope.

When they were supplied, he wrote on the envelope, "Come and speak to me for a moment if you can. I won't keep you.—STEPHEN ALISON."

He folded the envelope, and sent it by a waiter to Jack Darvell.

"By Jove, he does know you!" exclaimed the young fellow who had been talking to Mrs. Darvell. "Who is he, Jack?"

Mr. Darvell took the envelope and read the message. Then he gave a little cry of surprise, and his handsome face had a shade of annoyance on it.

"It's a man I used to know," he explained to the company. "Excuse me a moment." He rose and came down the room to Alison's table.

Alison held out his hand—the other man appeared not to notice it. "Upon my word, I didn't know you," he said. "Always seeing you with a beard before—of course, it makes a difference."

Then he lowered his voice as he sat down at the table, and half whispered, "How long have you been out?"

"A month."

"Poor old chap! it was rough on you."

"Yes, and I don't suppose you expected to see me here now?"

"Well, I can't say I did; but I'm glad, because, of course, you're doing all right?"

"No," said Alison; "but *you* are, evidently."

"Yes, I'm all right now. I'm married and settled down."

"I'm glad of that. Jack, you owed me £100 when I was put away."

"Yes—of course. I—I'll pay you to-morrow."

"I haven't a farthing in the world—not even to pay for the dinner I've ordered. Give me a fiver now!"

Darvell put his hand into his breast-pocket, took out a case, and pushed a £5 note towards his creditor.

"Thanks. Now, don't let me keep you from your friends. Where shall I see you to-morrow for the balance?"

"I'll send you notes. Give me your address."

Stephen Alison hesitated. "Oh, send it to me at Kelly's Library—I'll call for the letter," he said, after a pause.

Stephen Alison resumed his dinner and found it excellent, and the champagne exhilarating. The manager came to his table and inquired if the wine was sufficiently cool.

"Just right," replied Alison. "Oh, by-the-bye—can you tell me who that pretty woman in the diamonds is, sitting by Mr. Darvell?"

"Oh yes; that's his wife, sir."

"His wife—and who was she?—anybody in particular?"

"Yes, sir—widow of Mr. George Mallandaine—used to be on the Halls—Miss Molly Joyce, her professional name was. Everything to your satisfaction, sir?"

"Yes, thank you."

The manager moved away, and Stephen Alison, ex-convict and ticket-of-leave man, sipped his wine and thought of the whirligig of Fate. He had entered the restaurant penniless, now he had five pounds in his pocket—to-morrow he would have a hundred. And Jack Darvell would help him to make a fresh start of some kind. He owed him that, in common gratitude.

Stephen Alison asked for his bill and paid it, and received the change. He had £3, 10s. left. And to-morrow! Ah! well, with the rest of the money that would be his he would go away. He would go to America. Then——

Suddenly he paused in his train of thought. He would like to see his wife and his little May—*little May*—she would be eighteen now! But he had passed out of their lives for ever. To go to them, to let them see him and know him again, would be an infamy. But he might see them *without* their seeing him.

He knew where they were. He had visited his brother-in-law at the Hermitage, Patterdale, in the old days. The Hermitage faced the edge of a wood. He could watch among the trees. He could watch until he saw them—at the window—in the garden. His heart yearned for a sight of his dear ones, now that he had made up his mind to leave England for ever.

He asked a waiter for the A.B.C., and looked out the trains to the nearest station. He had money enough for his fare, and he could get a conveyance to Patterdale. He would go down the first thing in the morning.

"Marion, my wife!—May, my child!" he said to himself. "I must—I will see you once—once again, and for the last time—I will look on your dear faces, and carry the memory of them with me into the new world and the new life." And the faces of his wife and child as he remembered them—as he saw them last—seemed to smile upon him.

He heaved a deep sigh of relief—his stern, set features relaxed. A new light shone in his eyes—a new purpose had come into his heart. He leaned forward and took a white flower from the glass on the table, and mechanically placed it in his buttonhole.

CHAPTER III

MAY ALISON

A young man of four-and-twenty, whose good-looking, deeply bronzed face told of long exposure to wind and sun in lands where the summers consist of something more than our traditional three fine days and a thunderstorm, was strolling through the woods near one of the loveliest villages in Lakeland. His companion was a stout, dapper little man of about fifty, with a "theatrical" looking face and a closely cropped black moustache, tinged with grey.

"I can't get over meeting you here, Tom," said the young man, as the pair strolled along together. "I could hardly believe my eyes. At first I didn't think it could be you, because you hadn't got your banjo."

"Ah, I don't have that with me when I've a off-day, Mr. Avory, and this is a off-week, you know. My gal Jenny, you see, sir, as you've heard me speak of, as is a Royal Academy of Music scholar, God bless her! and a beautifuller voice you never heard, she's been a bit ailing

like lately—sticking too close to her studies, I expect—and so her mother says to me, 'Tom,' she says, 'Our Jenny wants the fresh air and a change—can't you take her away somewhere?' Jenny wouldn't hear of it at first. She says, 'Oh no, father—I shall be better soon, it's nothing.' But the missis she fidgeted, and so I made up my mind to give myself a holiday too, and we've been doin' the lakes, if you please, me an' my gal."

"Ah," said Dennis Avory, "that's it, is it? But I should have thought Margate or Brighton would have been more in your line, Tom."

Tom Verity looked up at the young man, with a pained look.

"No, thank you, sir," he said; "I don't take my gal to places like them. Everybody knows me there for what I am—a racecourse musician—a street singer. If it comes to that though, I am patronised by the aristocracy, and have sung at the big house-parties at Ascot and Goodwood, and on the best house-boats at Henley. I was a nigger at first, and used to black up till I got in with the swells, and found they liked my songs best without the burnt cork. And my brother—you've heard me speak of my brother, sir, Sergeant Verity, the celebrated detective?—I think he was glad when I took the cork off, and I know Jenny was. But, black face or white, I don't take my Jenny, a Royal Academy of Music scholar, about with me to Margate and Ramsgate and places where I'm known as an al fresky musician."

"Ah, I see, Tom," said the young man, "Miss Jenny of the Royal Academy of Music looks down on the outdoor business."

"No, sir—don't you think that. My Jenny don't look down on me—but I looks up to her. It's her future I'm thinking of. She's singing for her medal next term, sir, and the professors at the Academy think a lot of her. It might do her harm to be seen with me by people as know what I am."

"I quite understand, Tom," said Dennis Avory, laughing, "but where's the future prima donna?"

"She's sitting in the hotel garden, sir. She don't care to walk much, but I thought I'd like a stroll, and so I come to have a ramble through the woods. I'm fond o'

Natur', you know, when I can have it without the roar o' the racecourse."

"Well, I'm very glad you did, for I met you, and it has quite brought back old times."

"I ain't seen you for a year or two. You don't go racing now?"

"No, Tom. I got hit hard and gave it up. I paid my debts and went off to South Africa."

"And now I hope you've come back a millionaire?"

"No, Tom—but I paid my way, and now I've come back, not a millionaire myself, but to be secretary to one."

"A South African millionaire. Is he going to have racehorses?"

"I don't think so, Tom. Mr. Clement Hansell, from all I hear, isn't that sort of person. I had a letter of introduction to him from a friend and presented it to him at Johannesburg. I heard he was coming to England, and wanted a secretary who knew London and the right people in it. I went to see him. He liked me, and engaged me at a splendid salary."

"And are you with him now, sir?"

"No," said Dennis Avory, with a laugh. "I've just run down to see a married sister who lives here. I'm having a holiday. Mr. Clement Hansell doesn't arrive in London, I believe, for some days yet. He'll let me know when I'm wanted."

"Going to build himself a grand new mansion, I suppose? They all do."

"No, he's taken a furnished house for the season in Grosvenor Place. That is where I am to join him when he arrives."

"Ah, well, sir," said Tom, "sure I'm glad to see you again—you were always a free-handed, kind-hearted gentleman, and many's the half-sov. you've pitched off the top of a coach into my hat at a meeting, sir."

"Well, Tom, and now, for the sake of old times, I hope——" Dennis Avory had slipped his thumb and finger into his waistcoat-pocket.

"Ah no, please, not that, sir!" The racecourse singer held up his hand deprecatingly. "You see, I'm private this week, sir. And I ain't hard-up either. I've a bit

put by, and my Jenny'll have the best musical education —God bless her!—as money can buy."

"Well, Tom, you're an honest fellow," replied the young man, smiling, "and I like you for your independence. But, after all, there's nothing for your daughter to be ashamed of in what you do. If ever she turns out a great singer, Tom, it was with the money that her father earned by singing that she was educated."

"Thank you, sir, thank you kindly; that's what Jenny says to me herself when I kind of apologise to her. She don't mind it a bit now; but I don't think as she quite liked the *black*."

"No, Tom; between that and the Royal Academy there is a bit of a gulf. Halloa—what's this?"

The young man stopped suddenly. A fair, pretty girl of eighteen was running hastily towards them. "This isn't your daughter, is it?"

"No, sir," said Tom; "it ain't my Jenny."

The young lady had by this time come up to them.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered, "but I'm in great trouble. Will you please come to my uncle? He's fallen over a tree and hurt his foot, I fear. He can't walk. If you—if you——"

The girl seemed confused and hesitated. Dennis Avory ran to her assistance.

"Where is your uncle?" he asked. "We'll go to him at once—perhaps it's only a sprain."

"I'm afraid it's worse than that; he seems in great pain —and we had so far to go, I don't know what to do."

As the girl spoke she turned, and led the men through the wood to the spot where her uncle had fallen. He was a handsome, military-looking man of about sixty, with a red face, and white moustache, and closely trimmed white whiskers. He had those peculiar blue eyes which seemed to be set in a fixed stare. They were large, round, blue eyes, and when you looked at them you saw nothing else. They were like the eyes of a baby staring with astonishment at some new toy which its nurse was holding up to it.

When Dennis Avory and Tom Verity came suddenly upon the old gentleman sitting, the picture of comic despair, beside his smashed hat, and staring with baby blue eyes of wonder at his injured foot, it was as much as

both men could do to repress a smile. The old gentleman raised his blue eyes from his foot and fixed them on the new-comers.

"Er—er—my good friends—I don't know where my niece found you—but I—egad—may I—how my ankle hurts—I believe I've broken it!"

"Oh, don't say that, uncle!" cried the girl piteously.

"But—er—dash it, my dear, I do say so! I shall never get home. I shall have to stay here all night, and that will be most uncomfortable—most uncomfortable! I shall catch my death of cold and my ankle will mortify—I shall have to have my leg amputated. I've a weak heart, and I shall go off under the chloroform!"

Tom Verity burst out laughing, and whispered to Mr. Avory, "He's a character, sir—what a comic song he'd make!"

But Dennis Avory, though he quite appreciated the humour of the situation, was more considerate of the young lady's feelings.

He stooped down to the old gentleman and said, "Come, sir, I hope it's not so serious as that. I and my friend here will help you up. Lean on us."

The men stooped down, and putting each an arm under his shoulders helped the old gentleman up. But he only stood on one leg and stared with his big blue eyes at the other, which he held carefully from the ground.

"And how am I to get home on one leg?" he exclaimed. "Confound it, sir, I'm not the one-legged clown. Tell the gentlemen, May, that I'm not the one-legged clown — nor a flamingo — and I haven't played hop-scotch for fifty years. I couldn't hop a yard—I certainly am not going to try to hop two miles—I should be exhausted—I should fall down and die in an apoplectic fit, and be found dead in a ditch like a blessed pauper. May, my dear, I never thought I should come to die in a ditch."

"Oh, uncle, what things you say!" exclaimed his niece, blushing as she looked at Dennis; "I'm sure these gentlemen don't understand you."

"Oh yes, we do," said Dennis, "but we must get your uncle home somehow, and you haven't told us where you live."

"Oh, how foolish of me—but you must excuse me, this accident has upset me so. This is my uncle, Captain Halford, and we live at the Hermitage, just this side of Patterdale—it is two miles from here."

"Yes," said Dennis; "and it's certain your uncle can't walk that distance."

"Absolutely!" groaned the Captain.

Tom Verity had been thinking. "Look here, sir," he said presently to Dennis, "perhaps if we was to get the gentleman so far as the high-road, a cart or a trap o' some sort might come along."

"Yes, yes," said the girl eagerly, "that would be the best—and when we get home I can send for a doctor at once."

Dennis and Tom managed to carry the old gentleman between them through the wood, by easy stages, till they reached the high-road that skirted it, then they put him down gently with his legs in a ditch, and waited for something to come by. But for the girl's pained face Dennis Avory would have laughed out loud at the extraordinary remarks of the injured man. Tom Verity, less schooled in the polite art of keeping his countenance, had to turn his face away, pretending to look for a vehicle, in order to grin unobserved.

By the time the little party had reached the high-road the Captain had settled all the details of his funeral, had accused the undertaker of wholesale robbery, and had foreseen a family quarrel over his coffin. At last a cart came in sight. It was that of a Patterdale farmer. With his assistance Mr. Avory and Tom Verity got the injured man into the vehicle.

Tom Verity, who was getting anxious to return to his daughter, who was at the inn, offered to go in the cart with the Captain, and his offer was accepted.

"I shall tumble out if somebody doesn't come," said the old gentleman. "I shall fall out of the ramshackle thing, and the wheels will go over my neck and break it, and I shall be left by this fellow at some low public-house and thrown into a stable, and they'll hold an inquest on me in the taproom."

And so Tom Verity, smiling to his old racecourse patron, and raising his hat politely to the young lady,

drove off with the Captain, and Dennis offered to walk with the niece and see her safely home.

As they walked together in the deepening gloom of the autumn evening, Dennis stole many admiring glances at his companion. She explained how the accident had happened, and told him that she and her mother lived with the Captain, who was a widower with one son, Cecil, who was in London reading for the Bar. Her mother was a great invalid, and so she was the Captain's constant companion in the long walks about the country which he loved to take. He was a little eccentric, but he was *so* good and kind when you knew him. Her father had died some years ago, and she and her mother had made their home with the Captain ever since.

"Your mother is your uncle's sister?—so your name is not Halford?"

"No, my name is Alison—May Alison."

"It is a pretty name," said Dennis gallantly, "and I am not likely to forget it—nor the odd adventure which has made us known to each other. We are almost neighbours, you know, but I have only lately come here, and know no one—I am Dennis Avory, and my sister is Mrs. Halliwell, of the Grange."

"Oh," exclaimed May, "is she really? Mr. Halliwell and my uncle are friends, I know. I shall tell him, and it will give him a double pleasure in thanking you for the kind assistance you have rendered him to-day."

When they reached the Hermitage Tom Verity was outside.

"The Captain's all right, miss," he said, coming to meet them. "He's lying on the sofa, and the doctor's there, and he says it's only a bit of a twist. But, oh! ain't he just been going on? He'd got as far as going about with a wooden leg, and getting it stuck in the rails at a level crossing, just as the down express was coming, when I left him. I suppose by this time his remains are scattered about the lines, and the rest of him's gone up to town on the engine-guard."

May Alison smiled, and shaking hands with Dennis Avory, and thanking Tom Verity for his kindness, went in to see after her uncle.

"She's a pretty girl, and no mistake, sir!" said Tom,

as he saw Dennis gazing in admiration after May Alison. "And a pleasant-spoken young lady, *too*—but if I might make so bold, and it ain't out of your way, sir, I'd like you to come to the inn and let me introduce you to my Jenny."

"With pleasure," said Dennis.

There was a rustle among the trees at the edge of the wood. Dennis Avory looked up and started. A man was standing there looking intently in the direction of the Hermitage.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dennis, moving towards the gentleman. "Why—Mr. Hansell——"

But before he could reach him the man had turned hastily and plunged into the wood.

"Why, goodness me, sir! you don't mean to say as that's the millionaire you was talking about?"

"Well, of course, it couldn't have been!" exclaimed Dennis—"it's absurd—what should he want here? Besides, when I spoke he'd have answered. But upon my word, at first sight I would have sworn to him. I only saw him that one day in his office at Johannesburg, but it's not a face to forget."

Then they walked on towards the hotel, and Tom Verity talked of his daughter Jenny to his heart's content. But Dennis Avory was thoughtful, and answered at random. He couldn't get it out of his head that it was Mr. Clement Hansell who had been watching in the wood while he said good-bye to May Alison.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. CHIPCHASE'S LODGER

LOBELIA CUTTS was cleaning the front doorsteps of No. 10, Exton Street, Euston Road, with unusual vigour. If the steps had been her worst enemy and the hearthstone a crushing argument, Lobelia could not have rubbed it in more spitefully.

Lobelia Cutts was a young person of fifteen, with a face

five years too old for her, a dress several inches too short for her, and a pair of boots two sizes too large for her.

Lobelia had overslept herself that morning, and in consequence had to take a great deal more of the rough side of her aunt's tongue than the young lady, who had her feelings, could digest.

Moreover, her aunt, to whom Lobelia had given "a back answer," had threatened to box her ears, and had considerably added to the insult which such a threat conveyed by making it in the presence of Mr. James Chipchase, known in the cab trade as "All on Jimmy," on account of the general tastiness of his wardrobe. Old Sam Chipchase, who "owned his own lot" and drove a four-wheeler, used to shake his head when he saw Jim turn out, but he was proud of his son for all that. The only thing he couldn't stand about young Jim was his air of superiority in discussing the topics of the day.

"You've got four-wheeler ideas, father, and I've got two-wheel ideas," the young man would say; "you takes life from the rumbling growler point of view—I looks at things from the box of a S. and T. hansom on india-rubber tyres. That's why we don't see 'em alike."

But Lobelia—Lobelia, the orphan daughter of Mrs. Chipchase's only sister, the late Susan Cutts—looked upon Jim Chipchase with eyes of reverence that saw no flaw. Never in all the penny novelettes that she devoured surreptitiously had she ever come across a hero to be compared with her cousin Jim. And Jim had just come in from the barber's, where he had been for his regular morning shave, as Mrs. Chipchase gave Lobelia a bit of her mind for oversleeping herself, and threatened to box her ears.

The ears couldn't have tingled more had they been attacked with the blow, instead of with the threat, and with tears of indignation and shame in her eyes, the girl had seized her bucket and flannel and bumped herself down at the doorstep, and hearthstoned with all the force of which she was capable, in order to ease her overwrought feelings.

"Box my ears indeed, will she?" she muttered to her flannel. "Let her touch me, and I'll have the lor of 'er

—I'll go before a magistrate and take out a summons. 'Cus my blood runs in her veins she makes me work for nothing—on'y my vittles and the bits o' rags as I stands upright in—and she *'as* to give me them. I couldn't clean the steps and do the *'ouse*-work and answer the door without 'em, I suppose, could I?"

There was no answer to her question either from the bucket or the flannel, and the hearthstone—considerably reduced in size from the violent rubbing it had received—preserved an obstinate silence. But a sharp voice came down the narrow little hall and caused Lobelia to toss her head.

"Lobelia!"

"All right," muttered the girl to herself, "shout a bit louder and p'r'aps I shall hear you."

"Lo-be-liar!"

There was an angry ring in the voice this time, and Lobelia rose and gathered her implements of warfare together and went into the passage.

"Coming, aunt," she shouted back. "I've just finished the steps."

Mrs. Chipchase in a skirt and a flannel jacket came out of the back room. She was a thin little woman of about fifty-five, with a quick, excitable manner, but by no means an ill-tempered looking face. Mrs. Chipchase at once gave you the impression that she was the business head of the establishment.

"Come on, Lobelia," she exclaimed. "Late out o' bed, late all day! Your breakfast's waiting—have it and clear away."

Lobelia carried her pail and flannel into the back yard, wiped her wet, red hands on her coarse apron, and sat down to the thick slices of bread and butter and the cup of cocoa which her aunt had put aside for her.

Her uncle in his cardigan jacket was smoking his morning pipe by the fire, preparing for turning out for the day. He went on the rank at ten o'clock.

Sam Chipchase, although, thanks to the excellent management of his wife, he was now "a master," and rented the whole of the little house in which he and his family lived, was a typical cabby of the "four-wheeler" style. He was slow in his speech, deliberate in his

actions; he grunted when he sat down, and he grunted when he rose. The grunt was intended for a groan, which is a habit of four-wheel cabmen, who, from long exposure to the wet and cold, invariably suffer from rheumatics, and get into the habit of groaning every time they move, whether the pains are upon them or not.

You have observed the same force of habit in a groom. When he polishes a carriage-lamp, he makes exactly the same noise with his mouth that he does when he scrapes a horse down. In the latter case, the action is a necessity. It is to blow the dust away from his eyes and nostrils. In the former case, it is purely a habit.

Lobelia's practised eye had not rested on her uncle for a moment before she was sure that between him and her aunt there had arisen a by no means unfrequent difference of opinion.

For a minute or two after her entrance there was silence. Then Sam Chipchase, having re-filled his pipe, glanced at the clock and rose to go. He groaned and jerked his hand towards the door behind which his overcoat was hanging on a nail, and Lobelia reached it down and held it up for her uncle to put his arms in.

He groaned during the operation as though he were suffering acutely from having to lift his arms, and then, buttoning it with an assumption of pain in his finger-joints, he turned to his wife.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I suppose if you say it ain't to be—it ain't to be; but he looks like a gent as has seen better days, and it's a cruel cold mornin'. I'd give him a day or two longer."

"You'd give away your 'ead, Sam Chipchase," exclaimed his better half scornfully. "It's a fortnight owing now, and no luggage to speak of only what he stands up in. He was out all yesterday, and he came home goodness knows when—after we was in bed and asleep. It ain't safe, a man like that havin' the key o' the door."

"Oh, he's a respectable chap, I'm sure of that," urged Sam.

"No, he ain't! Respectable lodgers pays their rent. He pays to-day or he goes!" rejoined Mrs. Chipchase.

"Well, you know best—but I'd rather took to him from what I see of him. It ain't every day we lets our top room to a gent as goes out in evening dress, you know."

"Yes, and it's just that as puts my back up," said Mrs. Chipchase. "A man as goes out in a white tie, and 'as 'arf-a-dozen white shirts and finds the money to 'ave 'em washed somehow, and ain't a waiter—and he ain't that, I know—must have decent friends somewhere. Why don't he borrow the money o' them and pay what he owes?"

"P'raps he's tried, Maria, and it ain't come off. It don't always among toffs, I've heard."

"Then if his swell friends won't lend him the rent I ain't goin' to give him his lodgin'. Lobelia!"

"Yes, aunt."

"Go upstairs to the top-front and knock at the door, and say as Mrs. Chipchase 'ud be glad of the ten shillings rent as is owing."

Lobelia didn't care for the job, but she had to go. In all the stories she had ever read the men and women who couldn't pay their rent were always the persecuted heroes and heroines, and the landladies and landlords who insisted on having it were hard-hearted wretches.

Lobelia had been much taken with the appearance of their top-front when he went out of an evening. She sometimes met him coming downstairs with his overcoat open, and the shirt front and the white tie appealed strongly to her imagination. It suggested at once the Lord Algernons and the Lord Aubreys who figure in the illustrations on the cover of the novelette, or the front page of "The Girl's Story Teller."

The only thing against the romance of the top-floor's appearance was that he was middle-aged. In all the popular periodicals of the day prepared for the reading of the masses, the hero is never more than twenty-two, and you know with whom he is in love (she is never more than eighteen) in the very first chapter. After the age of twenty-two the male characters who appear in evening dress are generally suitors who have been rejected by the heroine and have become villains in consequence.

Lobelia stopped outside the lodger's door to rub her apron over her face and to smooth her hair, and then she knocked softly. There was no answer, and thinking perhaps the lodger had gone out without being noticed, she opened the door.

The occupant of the room was sitting by the window. He was reading a letter. He looked up as Lobelia entered, and she noticed that tears were streaming down his face.

Lobelia had never seen a grown man cry before, and, as she explained afterwards to a female friend next door, "it made her feel bad."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she stammered, "but aunt's compliments, and will you let her have the rent, 'cus uncle's bought a horse and got to pay for it to-day."

The horse was a delicate invention of Lobelia's. She knew that horse-buying entailed a scraping together of the Chipchase economies, and she thought the excuse would remove the element of suspicion from her aunt's desire to see the colour of her lodger's money.

Stephen Alison put his hand in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a sovereign and handed it to Lobelia.

"Tell your aunt I'm very sorry—I intended to pay yesterday, but I had to go into the country, and I wasn't back till past midnight last night."

The girl took the money and went down the stairs three at a time. She felt that it was, in the outdoor language of Exeter Street, "one in the eye" for her aunt.

She flung the sovereign on the table with an air of triumph. "Here you are, aunt," she said. "He paid up on the nail directly I asked him—took a handful o' gold out of his pocket as if it was coppers."

"Handful of gold!" exclaimed Mrs. Chipchase, almost annoyed to find her suspicions of her lodger so substantially refuted; "and where should the likes o' him get handfuls of gold? It's my belief as he was up to no good yesterday, and that's why he come in in the the middle of the night."

"Well, aunt, it wasn't a handful perhaps," said Lobelia, who in trying to elevate the lodger in her aunt's eyes

had apparently lowered him. "It was a sovereign or two."

"I don't care. There's something wrong with the fellow—I'm sure of it. He's a thief or a burglar. He'll give the house a bad name, and we shall all be murdered in our beds. If he hadn't looked so respectable when he came, and spoke like a gentleman, and paid a week in advance, he'd never have crossed my threshold."

"Oh, aunt," said Lobelia, "you are 'ard on 'im, and no mistake. You said he wasn't respectable because he didn't pay his rent, and now you say he's a thief because he does."

"Hold your tongue, Lobelia!" exclaimed Mrs. Chipchase, firing up. "It's not for a chit of a girl like you to tell me how to treat a lodger in my own house. You're getting a sight to free with your tongue, my lady, and for two pins I'd——"

What her aunt would have done for two pins Lobelia never knew, for at that moment there was a knock at the front door, and when Lobelia opened it she found herself face to face with a burly, ruddy-faced gentleman, who asked if there was a lodger in the house named Alison.

"Yes," said Lobelia, "that's our top-floor."

"Ah," said the burly gentleman, "is he in?"

"Yes, sir—he's up in his room now."

"All right—show me the way and I'll go up to him."

Lobelia, calling to her aunt that it was some one to see Mr. Alison, ran up the stairs, and the burly gentleman followed her, but in a more leisurely fashion.

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Stephen Alison had read and re-read the letter which had brought the tears to his eyes, and still he held it in his hand.

It was the last that he had received from May—a letter which his wife had enclosed to him when he was awaiting his trial. May had been told that her papa was ill, and she had written him a sweet, girlish letter full of heartfelt love. She told him how she missed him, and that every night she prayed for him and asked God to make him well and bring him safe back to her and her mamma.

And now he had seen his little May again—seen her no longer a pretty child, but a beautiful girl fast ripening into womanhood. He had seen her, and he dared not speak to her. He had longed to take her in his arms and cry, "May, my darling May!" and he had not dared even to come out of the clump of trees behind which he was standing.

He had seen her coming along the road with a good-looking young fellow, and he had wondered who it was. He had stood back while the young man shook hands with her, and heard him call her Miss Alison.

At first there had been a jealous pang in his heart. He had fancied that already she had awakened love in the heart of a man, and that this was the suitor for her hand. But the parting was formal, and the words he caught told him that his daughter and the young fellow were mere acquaintances.

He had watched all day for a sight of his wife. Once he thought he saw her face at a window, but it was only there for a moment, and he was not sure.

When Captain Halford was assisted out of the farmer's cart, Alison had gone right back into the wood. He feared Halford might recognise him. He forgot the alteration which the shaving of his beard had made in his face.

Once he thought that he would go boldly to the house and ask to see his dear ones. But he remembered the compact he had made. He remembered that his daughter had been told that her father was dead.

He tore himself away at last as the darkness fell, and drove back to the railway station, and took the evening express to London. He had scarcely slept all night. In the morning he had risen, and taken from the little packet that had been returned to him by the authorities on his release the last letter his wife had written him, and the letter she had sent him from May.

At last he roused himself with an effort, kissed the letter he had been reading, folded it, and put it back with the rest.

"I have seen her, thank God!" he said, "and now I must go away contented. I'll see Darvell to-day. There'll be a letter from him at Kelly's, I suppose. He'll

give me the money to go to America, and there, where no one knows me, I may make a fresh start."

At that moment he heard a man's voice on the landing say, "This room, is it? That will do—I don't want you any more."

Then the door opened and a burly man entered quietly, closing the door behind him.

"Good morning," he said, in a low voice. "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Alison. I am Sergeant Verity, of Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER V

A MILLIONAIRE

For a South African millionaire, Mr. Clement Hansell was remarkably modest and unostentatious. Although he had secured a furnished house in Grosvenor Place, and the bulk of his belongings had already been sent on there, he drove immediately on his arrival in London to an excellent but quiet hotel, and having taken a suite of rooms, requested a few minutes' interview with the manager.

To the manager he explained that he was anxious to have a few days in London to himself in order to transact some private business, and therefore he should be exceedingly obliged if the manager would not announce his arrival, and would as far as possible secure him the privacy he was anxious to enjoy.

"When I go to the house I have taken, of course I shall have to see people," he said, "and let the newspapers talk about me as much as they like. I suppose nowadays that sort of thing can't be avoided. But for the few days I am here there is no reason that I should not live the life of an ordinary visitor to London. That is what I wish to do."

The manager bowed, and said Mr. Hansell's wishes should be law. Mr. Hansell should be treated as an ordinary guest, and no communication should be made to the Press that the hotel had such a distinguished visitor beneath its roof.

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Mr. Clement Hansell was satisfied, and, the manager having retired, he sat down at the window and looked out into the busy street.

"Wonderful place, London!" he said to himself—"the only place for a man who has once been in it and of it. Great heavens! when I think that I've existed away from it for ten years, I'm absolutely astonished to find myself as clear-headed, as sound and vigorous, as full of 'go' as ever. Ten years of the life that I've led away from everything that a man with a sense of refinement and a delicate palate appreciates ought to have left me either an idiot or a misanthropist. But I've gone through it, and I've made it pay me to a pretty good tune, and now I'm going to compensate myself. I'm going to enjoy the luxury of being a good man and a public benefactor. I'm going to be at once the admiration and despair of the greatest city on earth. My name will be in everybody's mouth—my charities and my benevolent deeds will be in all the newspapers—but I shall be the modest and retiring millionaire, who neither receives nor visits except in the case of a few intimate friends. To know me will be the ambition of thousands, the privilege of a score. Well, after some of the men who've come back to the old country and performed like mountebanks at a fair, to the beating of drums and the blowing of horns, I should think that I shall be a welcome change."

Mr. Clement Hansell walked across the room and looked at himself in the glass.

"Not bad-looking," he said, with a smile, "and well preserved considering the rough time I had at first, and the way I've stuck to money-making ever since fortune put the ball at my feet. I think I looked better with a moustache, but I hadn't the courage to come back here with it. It was all very well in South Africa, where people have only known me as Clement Hansell; but here—well, it's just as well to take precautions. Though every shilling was paid, certain people could interfere with me. Stephen I will find out and settle with. But still there would be an end to my beautiful idea, and it would be confoundedly unpleasant for Mr. Clement Hansell to be tapped on the shoulder one day by some

one with a good memory for faces and saluted as—Come in!"

The millionaire had been interrupted in his reverie by a knock at the door.

"Telegram for you, sir," said the waiter.

Mr. Hansell opened the message and glanced at it.

"All right—no answer," he said. Then he read it again quietly to himself.

"Yours received. Can come to town at an hour's notice.—Dennis Avory."

"Ah," said Mr. Hansell, "nice young fellow—splendid young fellow. At least, so he struck me when he came to my place in Johannesburg. And he had a capital letter of introduction. He'll be exceedingly useful to me in London, but I don't want him yet. He can start with me when I go to Grosvenor Place. I want a few days absolutely to myself before I burst upon the admiring Metropolis in all the glory of my millions."

Mr. Clement Hansell took a cigar from his case, lighted it, and put his back to the fire, his hands in his pockets, and leant against the mantelpiece.

"Yes," he said, "a few days of absolute privacy will be valuable. I must make one or two little investigations that I can't trust to any one else, and I'd better make them before the newspapers get hold of my arrival. They won't begin to paragraph me till I take up my residence at Grosvenor Place. I must find out what has happened to one or two people. But, after all, what has Clement Hansell to fear? Nothing!"

The millionaire turned round and looked at his face in the glass again. Then he repeated the words, "Nothing—absolutely nothing!"

He drew out his pocket-book and took from it an old letter and read it carefully.

"It's a threat," he said, "but the threat of a mad-woman. If she's troublesome, I could have her put away on this letter. I'll keep it until I find out where she is now."

He put the letter back into his pocket and rang the bell, and ordered dinner for eight o'clock. That pleasant

duty accomplished, he put on his overcoat and went out —to take his first stroll through the streets of the City he had not seen for ten years.

To a man who has been long absent from the Mother of Cities, the first walk must be exceedingly interesting. Change has been in every direction. During his absence narrow streets have yielded to broad, handsome thoroughfares; whole areas that once were little better than slums have been cleared, and vast hotels and splendid shops stand where, only a few years back, the thieves and ruffians of London herded, and the barrow of the costermonger supplied the "nobility and gentry" of the neighbourhood with all that they required for the domestic interior or for the daily *menu.* From being one of the ugliest cities in Europe, London has, during the last fifteen years, been transformed into one of the most beautiful, so far as shops, hotels, and street architecture generally are concerned. It is only in lighting and scavenging that London is still far behind not only most Continental cities, but many provincial ones.

Mr. Clement Hansell was just in the mood to take a deep interest in the marvellous transformations which met his eyes everywhere. He had been thinking over his own past and contrasting it with his own present, and the surroundings fitted into his train of thought admirably. He did not know London again, and he felt that this made it all the more probable that London would not know him again. He got confused with the changes at last, and lost his bearings, though in the old days he had known London fairly well.

He had two hours before dinner, and he wanted to walk: but finding that he was continually going astray, he hailed a hansom.

The driver, a smart young man, raised the reins with his whip, to avoid any damage to the nap of the fare's hat, and then, lifting the little trap-door, bent down and inquired where he was to drive to.

Mr. Clement Hansell named a street in the City, the cabman touched his horse gently with the whip, and the animal stepped out in excellent style. Mr. Clement Hansell had not gone far before he realised that he was being driven in an exceptionally smart turn-out. He

looked round the cab, and found an ivory-framed glass in which he could admire his features, a receptacle for his cigar-ash, and a box of matches waiting for his use.

"Ah," he said to himself, "there are no cabs like this where I come from, and they weren't like this in my time in London."

In a plate-glass window he caught sight of the turn-out, and he was struck not only with its smart appearance, but with the style of the driver, who had on a Newmarket coat with a flower in his buttonhole, and a high hat that might just have been sent home by Lincoln & Bennett.

When the street to which Mr. Hansell had requested to be driven was reached, he put up the trap and told his driver to drive on slowly till he stopped him. It was half-way down when he gave him the sign to pull up.

The fare got out and looked at a big block of offices, and seemed bewildered.

"It was here," he said, "of course it was—just opposite the church—there's the church, but where's the old place?"

Suddenly he realised what had happened. "Pulled down," he said—"pulled down, and this block of modern buildings put up on the site. Gone—vanished from the earth—not a vestige of the old place left!"

He made a movement that sounded like a sigh, but it was a sigh of satisfaction.

He looked across at the church again, and saw that an old man had a pedlar's box spread out against the railings, and that his principal wares were small dog-collars and boot-laces.

"*He's* there still, then," the millionaire said, and he strolled across and spoke to the man.

"How long has that new building been up—can you tell me?" he asked.

"Oh yes," replied the old man, "it must be eight year or more—quite that. The old house was pulled down just after Alison & Co. went smash, I remember; that used to be their place."

Mr. Clement Hansell put a shilling into the old man's hand, and went back and got into the cab. He told the cabman to drive him to Charing Cross. He drew out his pocket-book and made a memorandum in it. Then he sat

back in the cab and thought of the old times that had been, and the new times that were to be. At Charing Cross he paid his fare and continued his journey on foot.

. . . . . .

When Jim Chipchase pulled up on the rank a little later and got down he noticed something lying on the floor of the cab.

It was a letter which the fare had evidently pulled out of his pocket accidentally.

Jim picked it up and saw that it was in a woman's handwriting. He read it, and elevated his eyebrows.

"H'm!" he said, "that's a rum sort of a letter, anyway. And no address on it. Only 'To Clement Hansell.' It isn't any good taking it to the Yard for a reward, for I don't think the owner would apply for it. I'll take care of it. Perhaps I shall see the gentleman again some day and then he can have it back—I expect he'd give a bit for it."

CHAPTER VI

SERGEANT VERITY

When Sergeant William Verity announced himself as an officer of police, Stephen Alison's first movement was one of indignation. That an Englishman's home is his castle is a maxim of the English law which applies equally to a prince in his palace and a ticket-of-leave man in his lodging.

Without a warrant no police officer has a right to cross the threshold of the most notorious criminal in London. And as Stephen Alison knew that he had done nothing to justify the granting of a warrant, his first impulse was to resist Sergeant Verity's intrusion and to order him out.

"Don't be upset, Mr. Alison," said the sergeant; "nobody here knows me or my business, and my visit to you is more of a friendly call than anything else."

"Well," said Alison, "what is it you have to say to me, that you come into my room an uninvited guest?"

"Ah, don't put it too roughly now, Mr. Alison," said the detective, "because if it comes to that I could have left this little matter in the hands of the police of your district, and they would have come with a warrant."

"The police—a warrant! I don't understand! What have I done?"

"Well, you have rendered yourself liable to arrest. I learnt that this morning, and when I heard it I said to the superintendent of your district, 'Leave this to me, sir,' I said: 'it'll be an opportunity for me to renew Mr. Alison's acquaintance.'"

"And what is it I have done, pray?" asked Alison haughtily, in the proud consciousness of innocence.

"Will you look at your licence, please?"

Stephen Alison thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a closed envelope. It was in that he carried his licence. He dared not leave it in his lodgings, or carry it loose in his pocket. An accident might at any time have revealed to the people about him that he was a ticket-of-leave man.

He drew the licence from the envelope, and the sergeant took it out of his hand and looked at it.

"See here, sir," he said, "I'll read it to you—it'll impress it on your memory better, perhaps."

The sergeant drew his chair close to Alison's and read the licence aloud in a low voice:—

NOTICE TO A CONVICT LIBERATED ON LICENCE.

Under the provisions of the Prevention of Crimes Acts, 1871 and 1879, and Penal Servitude Act, 1891, you are required to report your *entry into* and *removal from* a Police District to the Chief Officer of Police of the said District, or to such other person as he may appoint, and so long as you remain in the District you must report yourself *personally*, once a month, at such time as may be prescribed by the Chief Officer; and any change of address within the said District must be declared in like manner.

TAKE NOTICE, THEREFORE, that I, the undersigned, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, being the Chief Officer of Police of the Metropolitan Police District, require

that you report yourself personally, to the constable in charge of the police-station nearest to your place of abode, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 9 p.m., on the day of each month corresponding to the day of your release, and any change of residence shall likewise be declared to the said constable *prior to your removal.*

If you leave the district and again return to it, you must immediately report such return either at the Convict Supervision Office, New Scotland Yard, or at the police-station nearest to your place of abode.

The penalty for neglecting to do as above directed, or for leaving the district without declaring your intention to do so, is the forfeiture of your licence, or one year's imprisonment with hard labour.

E. R. C. BRADFORD.

Form 2 served by me on Stephen Alison, who is directed to report at King's Cross Road Police Station on the 22nd day of each month, between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.—J. JOHNSON.

Stephen Alison leapt up from his chair.

"What is to-day—the date?" he said huskily.

"The 24th."

Stephen Alison sat down again, and for a minute felt dazed. He remembered now that he had intended to report himself on the 22nd at first, and then the idea of committing suicide and ending it all had come to him. But the accidental meeting with Jack Darvell had completely altered his ideas of the future.

Directly there seemed a prospect of his getting his head above water again, the idea of seeing his wife and child once more, and then going to America, had come to him.

On the 23rd he had gone into Westmorland, and he had not returned until the small hours of the morning.

And now it was the 24th! Just as a chance of redeeming the past had come to him he had forfeited his licence, and was liable to be sent back to prison again for a year.

Suddenly his face brightened. The detective had been at pains to assure him that his visit was a friendly one. There might be some means yet of putting the matter right. He looked at the sergeant and asked him what could be done.

"Well, when we aren't dealing with an old offender, it is usual to give forty-eight hours' grace, and then if a satisfactory explanation of the neglect to report can be given, nothing more will be said."

Stephen Alison breathed freely once more.

"I can explain," he said. "It was quite an oversight. I should have come yesterday, but I was away in the country all day."

"Ah—what were you doing?"

"I went to see my wife and daughter.

The detective nodded. "That will be all right," he said; "but you will have to go personally to the police-station to report and explain. And now I'll tell you why I've made this an excuse for a personal visit. I know all about your case, Mr. Alison. Since you were convicted certain facts have come to my knowledge, and I think you were perhaps the least guilty person in that Turf fraud. I'm talking to you friendly because I know you are a gentleman, and I'm quite sure that your own desire is to get free of the past."

Stephen Alison smiled a bitter smile. "What freedom from the past am I ever likely to get?" he said. "What chance does an ex-convict get in England, unless he has powerful influence or rich friends? He can't escape from the memory of his crime, which remains with those who knew him—he can't escape from recognition by the scoundrels with whom he was compelled to associate."

"Well, it is hard," replied the sergeant. "I'm sure a lot of men try, and break down—especially men who're gentlemen—and you're one. They can't turn to anything like the rougher lot can. But there's one thing you can do."

"What is that?"

"Well, I don't quite know how to put it. Look here, you mustn't take what I am going to say as official, because I've come here as a friend. The fact is, you can do me a good turn and help justice as well, and I thought perhaps. . . . Come, I saw you and the Duke talking together the other night."

"Well!"

"Now, I'm old hand enough to know what the Duke

was likely to be talking about to a man who'd been in Portland with him."

"Whatever he was talking about I don't want to associate with him, and I told him so."

"Yes; but, now, suppose you had listened to him—suppose he'd told you of some job that he was going to work—and he works some big ones, coarse, rough brute as he is!—and suppose you thought better of it and you'd palled in with him."

Stephen Alison knitted his brows. "Are you asking me to become an informer, a police spy?" he exclaimed. "Is that your idea of the honest work by which a gentleman can redeem his past?"

Sergeant Verity shrugged his shoulders. "Of course you can put it that way," he said, "but I don't. I say that you can be the means of helping me to break up one of the most dangerous gangs in London. I've had the Duke once, but I want him the next time with the whole gang he works with—and if I am not mistaken there are some very big swells in it. Come—I think with a straight informer working with me, like you'd be, I can get at the bottom of a big thing and make some startling revelations that will send the whole London Press blazing out into six-inch headlines."

Stephen Alison rose. "I've no doubt you mean well," he said," "but I can't do it—I don't want to associate with men of that sort under any circumstances."

"Well, I've made the offer in a friendly spirit, and I'm not going to be offended because you don't see your way to it. There's no harm done. At any rate, my offer shows you that I don't look upon you as one of the regular lot. Now, the best thing you can do is to go and report yourself at the police-station, and save yourself getting into trouble. Good morning."

"Good morning, and I'm grateful to you for warning me of the mistake I had made."

The sergeant nodded and took his leave, and went out of the house.

At the top of Exton Street he was joined by a man who had been waiting for him at the corner.

Sergeant Gannett, of the Criminal Investigation Department, and Sergeant Verity had worked together in many

an intricate case. No two men knew better than they did the black spots in London's heart, but a life-long association with criminals had not killed William Verity's faith in the better side of human nature occasionally asserting itself even among the worst offenders. Sergeant Gannett, on the contrary, was a pessimist. He believed that when once a man had taken to criminal ways it was only a question of opportunity for him to take to them again.

Many a friendly dispute did he and his confrère have on this subject, and it was always a bitter disappointment to Verity when an ex-convict in whom he had "had faith" committed a fresh offence and justified Gannett's arguments.

"You're a soft-hearted idiot, William," Gannett would say sometimes. "You oughtn't to have been a policeman —you ought to have been a parson. Whenever there's a woman or a child in the case, you're as duck-hearted as a schoolgirl reading a story-book."

"I can't help it, Jack," Verity would say. "I've seen the wives and children of these men that we hunt like wild beasts: I know the misery some of 'em suffer while the men are serving their time; and I know, Jack, and so do you, how desperate hard it is for a man who's once been through our hands to earn an honest living. It's like expecting a horse to win a race with two jockeys on his back instead of one."

"Well, you can't help your feelings," Jack Gannett would answer, "but my system is the best at our game. Always believe an old lag is a thief still, until he proves he's an honest man."

"That's not English justice, Jack. English justice says that a man is to be treated as innocent till he's proved guilty—and that's what I do with all the new hands who come out on leave for the first time. I say to myself, 'They're going to keep straight, and I shall believe they're going straight till I find they're going crooked again.'"

Stephen Alison had interested Sergeant Verity for many reasons. The principal one was that Verity had known him by sight and reputation when he first went on the Turf after his brother failed and absconded. When the fraud was committed and police inquiries were made,

Sergeant Verity went to the house in the country to make a search. He saw the wife on whom the terrible blow had fallen—he saw the gentle girl, ignorant of her father's shame. May was playing on the lawn with a little Skye terrier, and her merry laugh cut the kindly officer to the heart. It seemed cruel to him that this bright, gentle little maiden should have a father in prison—a father who in all probability would be sentenced to a long term of penal servitude.

"It wasn't like taking a brutal ruffian away from the woman that he beats and kicks, from the children he thrashes and starves," he said afterwards; "what hurt me was having to prove the crime that would take a good husband and a loving father away from a gentle lady like Mrs. Alison and a sweet little girl like the daughter."

When Stephen Alison was liberated and his address was registered Sergeant Verity kept a friendly eye on him. He wondered why he didn't go to his people again, but he guessed the reason when he ascertained that they had found a home with relatives. The convict-husband is not often made a welcome guest by the wife's family.

When Alison failed to report himself he asked to be allowed to visit him. He was prompted principally by his remembrance of the wife and daughter in the pretty English country house, but also by his idea that Alison, who had probably no means and no employment, might help him to capture a gang of criminals who had hitherto eluded the police. A gentleman was wanted—a man of appearance and address—and yet one who, having been in gaol, would be looked upon without suspicion by the members of the band.

If Alison had consented he would have been furnished with money, and if the little scheme had been successful, he would have had a sum which would have given him a fresh start. The detective was convinced that, by securing this gang, he would find a clue to more than one crime for the arrest of the perpetrators of which a large reward had been offered. Gannett and he were working the job together, but Gannett had been opposed to the sergeant's idea of enlisting Alison's co-operation.

"You'll find him no good, Verity," he said; "when a gentleman goes wrong and does time, he comes out worse than the regular lag who's used to it."

. . . . . .

Sergeant Gannett was the first to speak as the two detectives walked away together after Verity's visit to the ex-convict.

"Well," he said, "had he got a tale ready to pitch?"

"He told me the truth," replied Verity. "He'd been to Westmorland to see his wife and daughter, and had forgotten the date."

"Ah!" said Gannett, "and what was the room like?"

"Poor—very poor—about five shillings a week, I should think."

"H'm—and you say he's trying to go straight. He hangs out in a five-shilling room, but he goes about in evening dress and dines at a restaurant where they charge you a sovereign to look at you, and the waiter expects half-a-crown."

"There's no crime in dining in a restaurant or in wearing evening dress."

"What about the Duke and him being together?"

"It was an accidental meeting, and he got away as soon as he could—I saw that myself."

"And what did he say when you asked him to pal in with the Duke for us?"

"He was indignant. Come, Jack, there's nothing in his refusing that—he's a gentleman."

"Well, you've got your opinion, and I've got mine. I believe he's standing in with the gang and you've made a false move. However, he's sure to report himself to-day, and I'll have him under observation when he leaves the station. I don't like that evening dress business—it looks like the old game."

"I don't think so," answered Verity. "I'll stake my reputation on Stephen Alison's going straight."

"And I'll stake mine on his going crooked again. Do you know who he was talking to at that restaurant?"

"Who?"

"Jack Darvell."

Sergeant Verity's face fell. "I'm sorry for that," he said, "but it doesn't prove anything."

"What!" exclaimed Sergeant Gannett. "You've told me again and again that you believe Darvell was in the Turf fraud with Alison, and yet when they come together again you think there's nothing in it. I say there is. And now I'm going to King's Cross. I wouldn't miss your protégé when he comes to report himself for worlds."

The men nodded to each other and separated. Sergeant Verity walked slowly along by himself, lost in thought. He was thinking of the broken-hearted lady and the sweet little girl with the merry laugh whom he had seen in Stephen Alison's home six years ago.

CHAPTER VII

A BIRD OF PREY

The morning after his meeting with "an old friend" at the Piccadilly restaurant Mr. Jack Darvell sat in the room he was pleased to call his "study," smoking a cigarette, and trying to find inspiration in the ceiling.

Some one has said—or ought to have said—"Tell me the books in a man's library, and I will tell you his character." The books in Mr. Jack Darvell's library were a number of volumes of the "Racing Calendar," a set of "Boxiana," some bound volumes of "Bell's Life," "Ruff's Guide," "Baily's Magazine," and some sporting novels.

Jack Darvell was as well known in a certain set as any man about town. He was good-looking, had excellent manners, dressed in the height of fashion without overstepping by a hair's breadth the bounds of good taste, and he had a beard which never had a hair out of place. Excellently groomed, slim, erect, and always smiling, Jack Darvell was the beau-ideal of what an English gentleman should be, so far as outward appearance was concerned.

But he was a whited sepulchre. There was not in all London a more unscrupulous scoundrel. No one could quite recollect when Jack Darvell first became a celebrity in sporting circles, and nobody had ever been found who could do more than hazard a guess as to where Jack Darvell originally came from.

He appeared for the first time, so far as old Turfites could recollect, at a steeple-chase meeting in Kempton Park, in company with two young gentlemen who were notorious card-sharpers, and an American who had the reputation of being a professional "bad man" in the United States.

His manner and his easy, bright *bonhomie* soon attracted attention, and some of the old hands at "the game"—swindling the young fellows who were novices at racing, enticing wealthy strangers to supper clubs, with games of cards to follow, at the chambers of Captain This or Lord That—thought they saw in him a useful ally.

There were all sorts of rumours about him. He was supposed to have been mixed up in a Turf fraud in which a wealthy young fool was induced, while under the influence of drink, to part with bills for a large amount. But the man with whom he had been mixed up in the matter—a man named Stephen Alison—never gave the slightest clue to the police to enable them to trace his accomplices.

After Alison's conviction and sentence to seven years' penal servitude Jack Darvell disappeared. He was supposed to have gone abroad. When he reappeared in London again he was seen at the race meetings and at the night clubs, and he was understood to be "touting" for a West End money-lender—that is to say, finding young men with prospects who wanted to borrow on the security of their future position.

Then came his marriage and his supposed settling down. He married a widow, and this is the lady's story.

A new patron of the Turf appeared in a young fellow who had lately come into a large fortune, a young gentleman named George Mallandaine. Young Mallandaine had no sooner escaped from the control of his guardians than he bought racers, betted to sensational amounts, and

fell in love and married a pretty little music-hall singer known as Molly Joyce.

No one had ever had a word to say against Molly. Frankly Bohemian, full of life and high spirits, she soon won her way to the front. Her father had been a butler in his best days and a waiter sent out by a firm of confectioners in his worst, and had eventually had to resign that and depend on the modest salary his daughter earned in the chorus of a travelling company when the rheumatics got him out of a berth and he failed to get another.

From the moment Molly got on to the Halls she did well, and when her father was left a widower she was able to make "a home" for him in a pretty little house in Camden Town. Everybody liked Molly, and when on Sundays she hired a landau and took old Tom Joyce to Richmond or Hampton Court or the Welsh Harp, there were plenty of hats raised in homage to the star who stuck to her father and wasn't a bit ashamed that everybody should know he had been a waiter.

When young Mr. Mallandaine fell in love with her and insisted on seeing her home, she very soon gave him to understand that though she was one of the Rowdy-Dowdy Boys on the music-hall stage she was a perfectly respectable young lady off it, and as soon as he blurted out the fact that he would like to marry her he was promptly introduced to papa, who was resting a rheumatic leg on the sofa of the little dining-room in Camden Town, smoking a long churchwarden, and drinking hot whisky and water, which was recommended for his complaint, he explained, "by the faculty."

The young gentleman didn't care about papa, but all the heart he had was Molly's, and so he proposed at 11.45 P.M. one Saturday night at the Camden Town supper-table, while Molly was making a hearty meal of cold veal and ham pie and bottled stout, and papa, whose appetite was not so good as it used to be, was toying with some bread and cheese and a few pickled walnuts.

It was *not* a private marriage. The music-hall profession attended in force, and old Tom Joyce, with an enormous flower in his buttonhole and a scarf that caused the

officiating clergyman to blink, gave his daughter away. At the wedding breakfast at Charing Cross Hotel, previous to the departure of the happy pair for a honeymoon trip to Paris, Mr. Joyce was in great force. He made a really pretty little speech about his good, dutiful daughter, which brought tears to the eyes of even the Lion Comique, and though he called the bridegroom "Sir," and shook hands with two of the waiters whom he recognised as old comrades, everybody said that Tom Joyce had come out splendidly.

Molly left the Halls for a time, but the young man didn't leave the Turf or his old companions, and eventually Molly had to make up her mind that all is not gold that glitters, and to give her husband up as a bad job so far as domestic affairs were concerned. But she was a business-like little woman, and she took care of herself, and when her husband died from the effects of late hours and champagne on a weak constitution, she had a fair amount of money and some magnificent jewellery.

But the will was a revelation. There had been no marriage-settlement, because old Tom Joyce didn't understand such things, and Molly hadn't heard of them. The young gentleman had been living on his capital, and all that was left to Molly was the interest of £20,000. The lawyer who had drawn up the will had proposed that the capital sum should not be available for the widow to do as she liked with, as she might marry again, and the tying-up of the money would be a sort of protection to her.

When two years later poor Molly fell madly in love with handsome Jack Darvell and married him, her salary was an excellent one, but she had no idea of going on "working." She wanted to leave the Halls and settle down. So the newly-married couple settled down in a charming house, which they furnished out of the ready money at the bank. But the £800 a year which was Molly's income didn't go far in such an establishment, and presently Jack, who had not been doing anything—or anybody—lately, found that he would have to begin "financing" on his own account if he wanted to live in the style in which he had started when he married Molly Mallandaine.

He didn't grumble at his wife for sacrificing her salary, and he didn't even lose his temper when he discovered that old Tom Joyce, the ex-waiter, was to be one of his family circle.

Young Mallandaine had been rude to him occasionally, and had upset the old gentleman and Molly too by sneering reference to his manners and habits and his peculiarities of speech, but Jack Darvell wasn't so particular. He let the old gentleman smoke his churchwarden all over the place, and only bargained that when they had any "smart men" to dinner his father-in-law should keep to his own apartment. But Mr. Joyce, in spite of his rheumatics, was of an active turn of mind, and would wander down into the kitchen and hover about the hall when there was a dinner-party, and superintend the operation.

Molly Joyce liked Jack for being amiable to her father, and, not knowing too much of his past, thought her husband "a real good sort," and she was happy. She knew he had been a racing man, and had been hard up at times. But Molly didn't see any harm in people being hard up. In "the profession" that is the normal condition of many of its most amiable patrons.

And now Jack Darvell had commenced "financing." He had looked up some of his old associates, and among them Sampson Gaygold, the money-lender. These two worthies had between them thought out a scheme, the discovery of which was later on to give quite a sensational novelty to the annals of crime. But they needed an accomplice, a man of good appearance and address, who would do that part of the work in which neither of them dared to appear. They had other parts to play.

The meeting at the restaurant with Stephen Alison had solved the difficulty. Here was the very man for the work. He was hard up—an ex-convict, unable to obtain honest employment, and a man with expensive tastes and habits, which, of course, he would be only too willing to gratify. He had worked the Turf fraud cleverly. It was only the unexpected which had happened—a young man who looked like dying of delirium tremens

had suddenly sobered down and had the courage to appeal to a court of law.

Alison was the man the confederates wanted in order to bring off the magnificent *coup* they had planned. Darvell had sent a letter to the library, but he had not enclosed any money. Alison with money might be tempted to make a struggle to be honest. Alison without a farthing in the world would probably wish to earn a good income in any way that was suggested to him. So Darvell put his address on the letter and requested his old accomplice to call upon him that morning. But the morning was nearly gone, and Alison had not come. Darvell was getting impatient. Presently he rose and rang the bell. Instead of a servant, his father-in-law entered.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Darvell," he said, "but Martin's gone across to the public-house to get me a clean pipe, so I thought I'd answer the bell myself—not to keep you waiting."

Darvell winced, but he kept his countenance. It wasn't a nice idea to have his father-in-law sending the man-servant, who, of course, "talked," across to the public-house for a long clay, but he had grown used to the eccentricities of Tom Joyce, and so he let the incident pass.

"Oh, I'm sorry you troubled, Mr. Joyce," he said. "I want Molly to come to me."

"All right, sir—I think she's in the droring-room—I'll go and tell her."

Mr. Joyce shuffled out of the room—he always wore slippers several sizes too large for him in the house, and occasionally went out in them. Presently, Molly Darvell came in singing the refrain of an old song in which she had once taken the town by storm.

"Jack," she said, "I've been thinking that after all perhaps I'd better go back to the Halls. I think I should do just as well as ever."

"Of course you would; but I sent for you to talk about something else."

"What is it?"

"I want to give a dinner-party—say, the day after to-morrow. I'm going to ask Lord Charlton and some fellows to meet him."

"What, Lord Charley, as the boys call him?—Jack, he reminds me awfully of poor George—he's quite as empty-headed, and he looks to me as if he'd break up young."

"Not so much 'Poor George,' Molly! You needn't always be reminding me of my predecessor."

Molly bent down and touched her husband's forehead with her lips. "Don't be an old goose," she said. "I'm sure you needn't be jealous of the poor boy. But about the dinner-party—Who are you going to ask?—only people I know?"

"It will be a man's party, so you can go out, but there will only be one new guest beside his Lordship—the gentleman I spoke to the other night at the restaurant."

"Alison you said his name was, didn't you, when I asked you coming home?"

"Yes, but I want to explain to you now—that he's changed his name. He won't be Alison at our party. His name is Mr. Stephens."

"Oh, all right, Jack; I don't care what his name is—but it's funny, isn't it?"

"No—I oughtn't to have called him Alison—I forgot that he changed it some years ago. Some one of the same name got into trouble and my friend found it awkward. Understand?"

"All right, Jack. If I meet him I'll Stephens him all over the place. Is he rich?"

"No, but I particularly want him to know Lord Charlton, and that's all."

When Molly had gone Jack Darvell lit a cigarette and put his back to the fire.

"Yes," he said to himself, "he's the very man. Charlton wants a fellow to go to America with him. He'll take to Alison at once, and then—well, if we bring it off, it's twenty thousand to cut up between myself and Gaygold—less what we have to give Alison. He ought to be here by now. I wonder if he's got my note. Halloa—there's a knock at the door. If it's Alison, I wonder whether he'll do as I've asked him. If he does, I shall know he's tired of being hard up, and he'll use the alias at once."

Martin the servant entered the room. "There's a gentleman called to see you, sir," he said.

"Did he give his name?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. Stephens."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE HERMITAGE

THE days went by at the Hermitage, and Captain Halford, whose ankle had been worse than was at first imagined, grew gradually better. But he had to be helped downstairs, and to lie on the sofa and to keep his leg up, but soon he was able to limp about with the assistance of a walking-stick.

Every day Dennis Avory had called to inquire after the invalid's health, and had been a welcome visitor.

Mrs. Alison, May's mother, to whom he was introduced on his second visit, was a surprise to him. A gentle and amiable lady, there was in her face a look of sadness which he could not understand. Captain Halford, in spite of his eccentricities of speech, was a man with whom it was impossible to feel dull, and May was as bright and charming a girl as ever brought sunshine into an English home.

Mrs. Alison Dennis knew was somewhat of an invalid, but she was not seriously ill, and at times when the conversation became lively and amusing her features would relax, and she would take part in it with a certain amount of spirit, but speedily she would drop back again into a listless attitude, and the look of sorrow and suffering would come back into her face.

On the day that Dennis received the note from Clement Hansell announcing his arrival in London he called at the Hermitage as usual to see the Captain. The Captain was in a state of temporary mental depression. He had caught a slight cold, and was filled with the gloomiest forebodings.

"I've caught my death, Mr. Avory," he exclaimed.

"I'm sure of it. I've got a delicate chest. The cold will settle on me and I shall have lung trouble. I shall have to go to the south of France every winter, among a lot of confounded foreigners. Foreign health resorts are frequently insanitary holes. I daresay the drains and the water will settle me—and they bury you in twenty-four hours, I'm told. I've a horror of being buried alive, but I daresay I shall be. I shall wake up in the dark and find myself kicking at my coffin lid."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that, I hope," said Dennis, laughing. "How did you take the cold? You haven't been out, I understand."

"Out—good gracious, no! An idiot of a servant put some of my things to air too near the fire in my bedroom the other night. I woke up and found them alight. I dashed a jug of cold water over the blaze and put it out. Room full of smoke—had to open window—perspiration pouring off me with jumping about on a weakened ankle—caught a fatal chill."

"Let's hope it's only a slight cold. You'll soon shake that off."

"I don't shake things off so easily. That fire haunts me—it was a narrow escape. If I hadn't woke up I might have ended my days like that Saint What-d'ye-call him, who was fried alive on a gridiron. I should have been roasted, and the house would have caught fire. I should have fallen in with the ruins and gone to ashes. They might have buried bits of brick and burnt wood in a coffin, and put my name on the lid, and I should have been sold for old building material to a local builder. Dash it, sir! it isn't pleasant to think that my remains might have been used to build a pig-sty for some confounded Radical farmer."

"I think you would have been spared that indignity," said Dennis, with a smile. "I fancy all the farmers about here are strong Conservatives."

"Ah, you make a joke of it," exclaimed the Captain, fixing his blue eyes, filled with childish reproach, on Dennis. "It's very funny to you, I daresay; but to me, sir, it is a most serious matter—I shan't get over the shock of that conflagration for years. If I were to wake up now and smell smoke I should probably leap

out of the window—I daresay that will be my fate. I shall be found impaled on the spikes of an iron railing—a nice thing to look forward to, isn't it? A man who has fought his country's battles to die in his night attire struggling on the spikes of an iron railing —and I've no doubt the weather will be beastly cold and raw! Ugh!"

Dennis Avory laughed aloud. "You are your own Zadkiel, Captain Halford—and that Prophet of Evil never foresees such disasters for the world as you imagine for yourself."

Then, to turn the Captain's attention from his impending fate, he told him that his pleasant visits to the Hermitage were drawing to a close. He might at any time be summoned to town to take his post as secretary to the South African millionaire.

"Ah," said the Captain, "so you're going to live with one of those African fellows, are you? What's his name?"

"Clement Hansell."

"H'm! I'm sorry for you, my boy. You'll have to mix with a shady lot. He'll keep prize-fighters and race-horses—he'll go to music-halls in a fur coat with a diamond the size of a decanter-stopper in his shirt-front."

"Oh no—he is nothing of that sort," replied Dennis, with a slight flush.

"Isn't he? I'm glad to hear it, for your sake; but I don't like these new millionaires. Money to-day is pushing brains, birth, education, talent, everything on one side. What's your millionaire like?"

"Well, I don't know much about him—I only saw him once in Johannesburg, at his office. I had a letter of introduction from an old friend of my father's I met out there. He liked me, I suppose, for finding I knew London well and some good people, he said he should want a secretary when he came to England, and he offered me the berth. I accepted it and came here, and now I'm only waiting till he sends for me."

The Captain shook his head. "I suppose you know your own business, Mr. Avory," he said, "but I don't like the idea of the sons of our old families bowing

and scraping to these mushroom millionaires. It's bad enough to see all the old places being sold to Yankee 'corner' men or financiers who started with a barrow in Petticoat Lane. If things go on as they're going now, we shall see a gentleman's son a lackey in the house his father sold to a pork butcher from Chicago or a freak of fortune from the diamond fields!"

The Captain, carried away by his warmth of feeling, forgot his ankle, and jumping suddenly to his feet gave it a shock, which caused him to cry out. May, who was in the next room, ran in.

"It's nothing," said the Captain. "I forgot my ankle, that's all."

Dennis, who was considerably upset by the Captain's pessimistic views concerning millionaires in general, and South African millionaires in particular, rose to take his leave.

"I may not see you again, Miss Alison," he said. "I may have to go to London now at any time."

"Oh, has Mr. Hansell arrived?" asked May.

"Yes, and I have telegraphed him that I will come when he wants me."

"Oh, I'm sorry you're going," said May. "I'm sure uncle will miss you."

The young man held out his hand and May put hers in it. As he pressed it gently he dared not utter the words that came to his lips. He wanted to ask her if she would not miss him too.

He had known her only a few days: yet slowly and surely an idea had taken possession of his heart. He had met for the first time the girl whose image remained with him, whose voice rang in his ears, whose eyes looked up to him in his dreams.

Dennis Avory had fallen in love with May Alison, and now he was going away, and he might not see her again for months, perhaps for years, for his engagement with Clement Hansell was not only to be with him in London, but to travel with him abroad. The acquaintance had been so short—only a few days—that he dared not even broach the subject to May or to her uncle.

He held May's hand longer than he ought to have done—he thought the gentle pressure that he gave it was

returned, but a man who is in love and in doubt at the same time will think anything.

When he let May's hand go he thought that she blushed slightly, but she had recovered her composure in a moment.

"I hope we shall see you again, Mr. Avory," she said, "when you come to Patterdale."

"When I come to Patterdale, my first visit will be here," he replied.

Then he shook hands with the Captain, who bade him a cordial farewell, and took his leave.

He had come to the Hermitage in high spirits—he left it depressed and unsettled. The Captain's doubt of Clement Hansell had made a deep impression on him. For the first time he wondered if he was not doing something ignoble in becoming the paid servant—for practically that was what it amounted to—of a man of whose past he knew nothing, and whose sole recommendation was that he had made a fortune in a land where strict morality in business is not the royal road to wealth, and where queer stories are told of the ways in which some of the big speculators have brought off their greatest *coups*.

"I'll keep my eyes open," said Dennis to himself as he strolled moodily through the little wood. "I'll watch Mr. Clement Hansell as a cat watches a mouse—and if I detect the slightest sign of everything not being as it should be, I'll throw up the post at once."

Walking along lost in thought he came presently to the spot where he had first met May Alison. He could see the whole scene again—the beautiful face, half smiling, half anxious—the graceful figure as it came towards him in the soft evening light—the frank, brown eyes that looked towards him in a mute appeal.

"I love her," he sighed to himself, "but what chance have I to win her? What am I? A prodigal who gambled his inheritance away, and had to go abroad because there was no fatted calf to be killed for him at home. And now I am secretary to a man of whom I know nothing, a man whom May's guardian looks upon as a doubtful character. The outlook isn't encouraging."

When Dennis Avory got home there was a telegram for him. It was from Clement Hansell, and told him that he was to come to town that day week and present himself at Grosvenor Place. Mr. Hansell would not take possession of the house until then.

"Why doesn't he write instead of telegraphing?" Dennis thought to himself. "But I suppose it's just his millionairy way of doing things. Never mind—I've got a week—I can go to the Hermitage again every day, and perhaps——"

He was young and a lover, and when you are young and a lover the possibilities of a week are immense.

. . . . . .

Soon after Dennis Avory had left the Hermitage Mrs. Alison came into the morning-room and found her brother alone. She had been wanting to speak to him for several days on a subject which was near her heart, but had hesitated, as his ankle had made Captain Halford irritable. The recital of his woes and apprehensions had evidently relieved the Captain's feelings, for when he looked up and saw his sister his manner was quiet and gentle, and he motioned her to come and sit beside him.

"My dear," he said, "you're looking ill again. I'm a selfish old fellow, and I'm afraid I think and talk a good deal about myself; but you've worried me a good deal lately. I'm afraid you're fretting again, and you promised me you'd be brave—for May's sake."

"I have tried, but I can't," answered Mrs. Alison, with a sigh. "I have kept count of the years, the months, the days, and now the thought haunts me that Stephen may be a free man again."

Captain Halford shifted his position and glanced uneasily at his sister.

"It was seven years," he said.

"Yes, but you remember what I learned at the time?—that if there was nothing against him, three months in every year would be remitted. If that is so, Richard, he is out now."

"Yes," said the Captain, knitting his usually placid brow. "I suppose it would be so. Stephen Alison is

out in the world again—a ticket-of-leave man. Ah, it is horrible—horrible!"

"But, remember how bitterly he has paid for his fault—how terribly he has atoned. If he is a free man now, he is friendless, perhaps penniless. Could we not—ought we not to find out? Won't you help him if you can? You can ascertain where he is. Let me see him again? Ah, Richard, if you knew what I am suffering—how the thought haunts me night and day that the man I love—my husband—the father of my sweet May—may be a lonely, heart-broken man in the great City—hungering, yearning for one kind word from us! Let me send him at least a message of forgiveness and hope?"

Captain Halford shook his head. "No, my dear," he said. "It must not be—it cannot be. He gave you up—he renounced all right to his child. He did the one thing he could do to save her from sharing his shame. If we communicate with him—if you see him—it will establish a link that may never again be broken. For May's sake, Stephen Alison must be dead to you—dead to his——"

Mrs. Alison rose, her cheeks wet with tears. "You may be right, brother," she said, "but it is killing me. All night I lie awake and see him stretching his arms towards me. I hear his voice calling my name. Oh, it is cruel—cruel! I didn't know what I was doing—I didn't realise then what it would mean when the prison doors opened for him and I, his wife, could not go to him and comfort him in his sorrow!"

"It must not be," said the Captain firmly—"unless——"

"Unless what?" exclaimed the wife eagerly.

"Unless you are willing to share his life—his exile, for that is the only thing possible—and be to May as he is to her—dead."

The unhappy woman uttered a little cry. "Give up May?" she sobbed. "Never see her again?"

"That is the alternative," replied the Captain. "Think, dear—think for yourself what it will mean. I'm sure if you went to Stephen the girl would learn the truth—others would learn it. May Alison would

cease to be my niece, the daughter of my widowed sister, and would be identified as the daughter of a convict. What chance would May have in the future? What decent gentleman would ask her to be his wife?"

"You are right," sobbed Mrs. Alison, burying her face in her hands. "I must not think of it. But oh, if I could see him! If I could know even where he was and send him one loving word to let him know my heart is faithful to him still. My poor Stephen—what can I do?—what can I do?"

Mrs. Alison, unable to control her sobs, rose and went to her own room. Then she flung herself on her knees and, lifting her hands to heaven, sobbed out a passionate prayer that God in His mercy would find some way of letting her see the husband she still loved with all her heart once again before she died.

CHAPTER IX

MR. STEPHENS

Stephen Alison had reported himself to the officer in charge at King's Cross police-station, his excuse after a severe examination had been accepted, and he had been cautioned to remember the terms of his licence, and to be more careful in the future. He had not mentioned anything about his desire to go to America. He thought it best to have his plans more definite before he informed the authorities of his intention to leave the country.

When he left the police-station he was pale and trembling. A new sense of humiliation had come upon him. In the prison, after the first shock, he had gradually grown accustomed to the routine. In the convict dress, among a convict population, he had in a certain sense lost his identity. The shame was there, but it was shut away from the eyes of honest men. He fell into the position of inferiority, of obedience to command, of silent submission to rough treatment, as a soldier in the ranks falls in with military discipline.

But he had left the prison, and was a free man mixing with free men. The secret of his true position was known only to himself and the police, and he passed among his fellow-citizens their equal in the rights and privileges of men.

When he entered the police-station to report himself he realised for the first time that the punishment of his crime was still in force.

He looked about him in a shamefaced way. A man and woman were talking outside the station doors—he hesitated for a minute to enter. It seemed to him that they would guess his errand. He walked the length of the street and came back again. There was no one about, and he entered unobserved.

The constable on duty asked him what he wanted, and he stammered and hesitated. When he explained, the man's manner altered. At first he had addressed him civilly, and with a certain amount of deference, for Stephen Alison looked a gentleman. But when he learnt it was a convict come to report himself, the policeman at war with the criminal classes asserted himself as such, and the man spoke brusquely and authoritatively.

"The inspector's in his office yonder," he said. "Knock at the door and go in."

Stephen went into the inspector's room, and when he handed in his paper he felt again that he was still a criminal.

The inspector was peremptory in his tone and severe in his manner, and Stephen was glad when the ordeal was over. He had a haunting idea that he would be locked up and sent to prison again.

The interview over, he went out into the street looking cautiously about him, and feeling as if every one passing would know that he was a convict at large.

It wasn't until he got some distance from the station that he recovered his self-command, and even then he was ill at ease. He was worried to think that while he remained in England month after month he would have to go to a police-station as a criminal and be treated as one. He had not one evil or dishonest thought in his heart. He had paid the penalty of his

crime, and he felt it a monstrous injustice that, if he was entitled to release, that release should not be unconditional.

He brooded over the idea all the time he was making his way to Kelly's Library, and it was not until he received a letter addressed to "Stephen Alison, Esq.," that his spirits revived.

There was a strange magic in the "Esq." It was a recognition of his past position of respectability.

He took the letter outside and opened it directly he got into the street. He had half expected that it would contain a cheque. To his intense disappointment there was nothing but a short letter in the envelope.

"DEAR ALISON,—I have put my private address at the top of this note. Come there on receipt, as I want to have a few minutes' conversation with you. I would rather you did not visit me in your old name, as some of my people, who know my connection with the Turf, might recognise it. I have something to propose to you which will be to your advantage, but it is important your old name should be dropped, and at once. When you come give your name to my servant as Stephens.—Yours, J. D."

Stephen Alison put the letter in his pocket with a sigh. The idea that to call upon a man who had been as guilty as himself—a man whom he had practically saved from sharing his fate—he must conceal his name, brought home to him strongly the ignominious position in which he had by his criminal act placed himself.

But probably Darvell was right, he thought. There must be hundreds of people to whom the name Stephen Alison would suggest the famous Turf Fraud. Yes—Darvell *was* right. He would call upon his old associate under a name which would not carry with it any suggestion of a case which Darvell evidently feared was still remembered.

. . . . . .

Darvell opened the proceedings cautiously. The proposition he had to make to his old associate was not

one which would come glibly off the tongue even among desperate criminals.

Alison was a gentleman, and had been a man of honour and integrity until the loss of his fortune and his mistaken idea of kindness to his wife and child tempted him to try and fight Fate with illegal weapons.

Darvell commenced by explaining that, great as was his desire to help his old associate out of his present fix and pay him the hundred pounds he owed him, he, Darvell, was unfortunately at this moment hard pressed for money himself.

Stephen's face fell when he heard this excuse. He knew men of Darvell's stamp too well not to see at once that his debtor meant to shuffle out of his obligation if he could.

"You *must* try and do something!" he exclaimed. "I am in desperate straits. I can't beg, and if I try to get employment no one will take me without my giving some account of myself, or referring to people who know me. Every one who knows me knows that I have been in prison. You see I am really in need of the money."

"I'm sorry, Alison, old chap, indeed I am," said Darvell, "but while I'm turning round, can't you get something from your relatives? Your wife, I believe, is living with her brother. He's got money, hasn't he?"

"I would rather die than ask them for a penny," said Alison proudly. "You don't suppose I'm going to be such a coward as to impose myself on my family *now*? It would be visiting them with the shame which must be mine alone."

Darvell immediately recognised that his one fear was removed. He had fancied that in desperate need Alison would apply through his wife to his brother-in-law. If the convict had had that source open to him, Darvell felt that his proposition would be rejected—as it was, he was emboldened to make it.

"What should you do with the money if I got it for you?"

"Clear out of England, where I am a marked man, and go abroad."

"Well, suppose I can put you in the way of going

to America? Suppose I can tell you how you can get your fare and your expenses paid, and have a good time in the States, and be the constant companion of a man whose position will enable you to go into any society you choose?"

Stephen rose, and went eagerly towards his old associate. "Ah!" he cried, "let me do that, and it will be the making of me."

"It rests with yourself. But, first of all, you've got to understand that there is a certain amount of danger attached to the situation."

"Danger?"

"Yes. I'll be perfectly frank with you. The man I want you to go with is a young fellow with a title and no brains. He's going the pace at a rate that *can* only have one end—but the sooner that end comes the better it will suit us."

"Us!"

"Yes—if you go into this scheme you will have to stand in with myself and Gaygold."

Stephens' face fell. "I don't quite understand you," he said. "What is it I am to do with this young fellow in order that I may 'stand in' with you and Gaygold?"

"Well, you see, it's this way. The young fellow is Lord Charlton, the only son of the Earl of Powick. Gaygold has got him money from time to time, and he has made him assign a life insurance for £20,000 as security. His lordship is mad to go to the Rocky Mountains, or some outlandish place of that sort, on a sporting expedition. But he can't find a gentleman to go with him. I've told him that I know one, and I have invited him to meet my friend Mr. Stephens the evening after to-morrow at dinner—here in my house."

"You want me to go to America with this young lord? But what difference will that make to your chance of dividing the £20,000?"

"*You'll* make the difference," said Darvell quietly. "You'll be together on the journey in plenty of lonely places—tops of mountains, deep abysses, edges of rivers, and that sort of thing. His lordship is sure to be in a chronic condition of brandy, and no one will be sur-

prised if one day he makes a false step and meets with a fatal accident."

"I understand," exclaimed Stephen, with difficulty controlling his indignation. "You want me to go abroad with this young man to *murder him!*"

Darvell lifted up his white delicate hand with a gesture of protestation. "My dear Stephen," he said quietly, "I want you to do nothing—I only want you to be present when this extremely probable *accident* occurs. Otherwise we might not hear of it, and we might have some difficulty in proving that the policy was payable."

"And I am to be paid for my *evidence* by you and Gaygold?" he said, in a hoarse voice.

"You will get your expenses paid for the journey by Charlton—if he *likes* you, and I'm sure he will. If the accident happens and we receive the £20,000—I am sharing the risk of the loan with Gaygold, you know—you will get a couple of thousand for the early information of the disaster."

Stephen Alison sat for a moment lost in thought. His first impulse had been to seize Darvell by the throat and denounce him as a cowardly assassin. But he had thought better of it. He recognised now for the first time the villainy of the plausible scoundrel who had led him on to commit the crime for which he had suffered alone. He was sorry now that he had spared this man in the first instance. And an idea had come to him. The words of Sergeant Verity, "You can atone for the past by helping the hands of Justice," rose to his memory.

Here was not only a scheme of unutterable villainy —for he quite understood what was meant by Darvell and Gaygold—but the life of a man was in jeopardy. To go to the police with a story of what was *going* to be done would not lead to anything. Darvell and Gaygold would absolutely deny any intention of foul play, and the police would be able to do nothing.

Yes, there was a better plan than informing the police at once. He would enter into the plot. He would find out all that it meant and how much more lay behind it, and he would accept the offer of travelling

with the young nobleman—not to injure him, but to protect him.

Stephen Alison rose with a sense of having commenced a good action—of being on the road to do something which might atone for his one great sin against society.

"When shall I have to go if this comes off," he said quietly, "and where shall I get the money for the preliminary expenses? There are many things I shall have to buy——"

"You'll probably have to go in about a week. Charlton's in a hurry to be off—I fancy he's being worried by some one here and wants to get away. As to the money, well, if you agree to go, Charlton himself will give you what you need on account. He understands that his companion will have to be paid. Well—what do you say? Will you take the post of travelling companion to his lordship, if I can get it for you?"

"Yes," said Alison, in a firm voice, "I'll take it."

"That's all right. Then the day after to-morrow you dine here at eight o'clock, and I shall have the pleasure of introducing my friend Lord Charlton to his future travelling companion, Mr. Stephens, and if Mr. Stephens is the man I take him for, we shall not be long before we shall trouble the insurance company for that twenty thousand pounds."

CHAPTER X

HER BRAVE PRESERVER

Mr. Cecil Halford came out of the Café Verrey, and stood for a moment at the corner of Hanover Street, evidently deliberating as to his next movements. He flung away the end of the cigarette he had been smoking, took another from his case mechanically, and put it in his mouth unlighted.

Every hansom cab-driver crawling past called out "Cab, sir?" but the young man took no notice. A precocious newsboy yelling the verdict and sentence in a City black-

mailing case which had been the sensation of the week stopped and held a paper under his nose. "Here y'are, Capting," he said. "Verdick and sentence—all the gashly details."

The young man turned his head and regarded the urchin in silence.

"Beg pardon," said the boy, seeing that he hadn't got a customer. "Didn't know as you was deaf and dumb. Pore chap, it must be a hawful hinfliction!" Then whistling shrilly through his teeth the latest popular music-hall tune, he shuffled on up the street.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and things were quiet in Regent Street. The shops were mostly closed, and the famous thoroughfare was almost as gloomy and deserted as a suburban side street. Up at the Oxford Street end there was life and bustle. The young people of the business houses were taking their evening promenade, and there was a steady flow of traffic in both directions. Down at the Piccadilly end there was light, noises and a constant changing of the many-coloured fragments of the great human kaleidoscope. But Regent Street was dull and dark and deserted, as it always is when the shops are closed and the business of the day is over. Presently the young man drew out his watch and looked at it.

"Just nine," he said. "I wonder if she is back yet. They'll be coming out presently. I've a good mind to go and wait."

One of the periodical concerts at which the students of the Royal Academy sing and play to each other and a few select friends was on, and Mr. Cecil Halford was wondering if a particular young lady in whom he was greatly interested was taking part in it.

He had ascertained the previous day from two of the young ladies he had met in the afternoon taking their tea at Elphinstone's, a confectioner's much affected by the female students of the R.A.M., that Miss Verity had not been attending for the past fortnight, but the professor of whom she was having her singing lessons had told them she had written to say she would take her lesson as usual the next morning.

The young ladies were with Miss Verity when she first

met Mr. Halford and the acquaintance commenced, and they were exceedingly interested, as most young ladies are in anything that looks like a romantic love affair.

Jenny Verity and her fellow-students were coming up Hanover Street from the Academy one afternoon, and were about to cross the road, when a horse attached to a heavy van and left unattended suddenly started off, and colliding with a hansom, knocked horse and vehicle and driver violently on to the pavement.

At the very moment of the collision Jenny Verity had stepped off the curb. Terrified at the sudden catastrophe, she lost her head and stood quite still. In another moment she would have been knocked down by the van horse. Her companions screamed and hid their faces, a proceeding in nowise calculated to assist their friend; but a young gentleman, who had been an eye-witness of the accident, sprang forward and seized the helpless girl, and dragged her out of danger. Unfortunately, in his excitement he dragged her a little too violently, and Jenny, losing her balance, slipped and fell on her knees on the pavement.

She declared she wasn't hurt, only shaken, but she was very white, and looked like fainting, and Cecil Halford insisted that she should come into Verrey's and have a little brandy.

Jenny, who really did feel very like going off, was urged to accept the kindly offer by her companions.

As soon as she felt better and had rested awhile in the café, the hero of the little street romance raised his hat and wished her good-day.

But he had ascertained from the conversation of her friends that she was a student at the Academy, and that her name was Jenny.

What more natural than that the young gentleman, having learned the hours at which Miss Verity usually left the establishment in Tenderden Street, should find himself occasionally in the neighbourhood, and should inquire after the young lady's health and express a sincere hope that she had in no way suffered from the shock?

At first Jenny, who had a sensible girl's dislike to

the attentions of a stranger, replied in a few courteous words and hurried off in a manner that gave her "brave preserver," as the girls who knew of the incident chaffingly called him, no encouragement.

But gradually the distances she allowed him to walk by her side grew greater and greater, and Mr. Cecil Halford's strolls through Hanover Square became more regular. Then Miss Verity's bosom friends, when they came through the Academy door with her, would look up the street and say, "Jenny, your brave preserver's there; you won't want us," and Jenny would blush and tell them not to talk nonsense.

But Jenny began to like the little strolls with the good-looking young fellow, and to feel disappointed when he was not at the accustomed spot. Although their conversation never went beyond the ordinary politeness of acquaintances, she was beginning to think about her "brave preserver" a great deal more than was good for her peace of mind. And being twenty years of age, and a young lady with a large amount of common sense, she didn't attempt to disguise from herself the fact that a young man of five-and-twenty wouldn't wait for her in Hanover Square three or four times a week if he didn't find a considerable amount of pleasure in her society.

These ideas didn't come to her all at once, but when she fully realised the position, she thought a great deal about it. She was a bright, merry girl, full of life and animal spirits, but with a strong vein of sentiment in her composition. She asked herself what her father and mother would say if they knew that she met a young fellow frequently of whom they knew nothing—of whom she herself knew nothing, except that he had told her his name was Cecil Halford, that his friends lived at Patterdale in Westmorland, and that he was in London reading for the Bar.

Jenny didn't know whether you read for the Bar at home in your own rooms, or in the British Museum, or the Law Courts; in fact, she knew nothing about it; but she couldn't help thinking that Mr. Halford's constant attendance on her must be a considerable interruption to his studies, and one day she told him good-

humouredly that she was afraid he must "play truant" very often.

Cecil Halford laughed, and said it was all right. He had an allowance from his father, who was pretty well off, and he wasn't expected to injure his health by too close an application to work.

Jenny Verity glanced at her companion's face as he spoke. There was something in his tone that she didn't quite like. She couldn't explain why the young man's manner conveyed to her a suspicion that he was rather ashamed of himself about something, but the idea came to her.

She fancied that he was disappointing his people—that they looked to him to make a career as her people looked to her. She asked him about his father and his home, and he told her of the lovely Lakeland, of his father, Captain Halford, and of his Cousin May.

The "Cousin May" gave Jenny a little pang of jealousy—of course it was absurd of her to feel anything of the sort, because she wasn't in love with this young fellow, and he wasn't in love with her. Only——

The pain at her heart when Cecil Halford's handsome face lit up as he talked of May brought Jenny Verity to her senses. She felt that she had been foolish in allowing things to go so far. The next time she met Cecil Halford and he wanted to walk with her she excused herself—she was in a hurry to get home.

After that she tried to avoid him, but he followed her, and asked her what was the matter. Then she stammered out an explanation. She didn't like meeting him so constantly. The students at the Academy talked about it.

"Oh, what nonsense!" exclaimed Cecil. "What harm is there in it? I should talk to any lady I had the honour of knowing. Surely we can walk up Regent Street together?"

"I don't think you ought to argue with me, Mr. Halford," said Jenny, her face flushing. "We must not meet like this again."

She was moving away, but Cecil laid his hand gently on her arm.

"Don't go like that," he said. "I shall miss you

dreadfully—I don't think I care for anything so much as I do for these little walks with you."

"Please don't say that," cried Jenny. "You—you have no right to."

"But surely there's no harm in what I've said?"

"You may not think so, but others might. Your father might think it wrong—and so might mine."

Cecil Halford bit his lip. Careless and easy-going, he had let his liking for Jenny Verity grow upon him without asking himself where it was leading him or what would be the end of it. The girl had put the situation plainly to him, and he disliked plain situations.

Jenny Verity looked at him earnestly for a moment, waiting for him to speak. Then she held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she said. "I trust to you as a gentleman not to wait for me any more."

"Of course, if you insist," he said; "but—Miss Verity, I shall feel it awfully. You don't know the pleasure I have in these little chats with you. Don't say I mustn't speak to you again."

"But I do say it, and I mean it—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you give me leave to tell my father and mother that I have been meeting you constantly, and I have their permission to continue the acquaintance."

Cecil Halford hesitated. Here again was a plain situation, and it was one that, for many reasons, he was not quite prepared to face. Meeting Jenny was one thing. Going to her father and asking him if he might continue to meet her was another.

He had no idea of harm. In his easy way he had taken a manly, honest liking to Jenny, but he hadn't thought the flirtation, or whatever the world would call it, out to its logical termination.

If Cecil Halford had taken the trouble to think things out to their logical conclusion, he would have been a much happier young man at that moment than he was. Certain things that he had done, without due thought and consideration, were already coming to their logical termination, and causing him a good deal of uneasiness.

But he wasn't going to lose Jenny without an effort.

"Of course I've no objection to your telling your people of our acquaintance," he said. "Suppose I call one afternoon when you're at home—to—er—inquire after your health? I—I might have done that before, only you have never told me where you live."

"You are quite right to remind me of that—I ought to have done so. But, of course, I didn't know we were going to meet so often."

Jenny took an envelope from her pocket and handed it to her admirer.

"This is my address," she said; "but if you are going to call and see my father you will have to come on Sunday."

"I understand," said Cecil, "he is in business in the City or something of that sort all the week?"

Jenny Verity's face was very serious and very white, and her lips trembled as they shaped the answer.

"No—he is nothing of that sort. He is a street musician. He plays the banjo and sings on racecourses."

Cecil Halford started back, his face almost as pale as Jenny's.

For a moment there was silence.

Then Jenny bent her head and said, quietly: "Now you know—you can please yourself about calling, but until you do call I must ask you not to speak to me again."

And before Cecil Halford had sufficiently recovered from the shock her revelation had given him, she had left his side and disappeared among the crowd.

. . . . . .

Jenny Verity went home and shut herself in her own room and cried for an hour. Then she bathed her eyes and went downstairs and told her mother she had a bad headache, and when her father came home he was upset and declared she was working too hard, and he wasn't going to have her make herself ill.

The days went by, and Cecil Halford made no sign, and Jenny grew paler and paler, and a doctor was called in.

The doctor said it was nerve trouble—she wanted a rest and change of scene; and Tom Verity talked it over with his wife and determined to take Jenny into the country for a holiday.

He didn't want to go where he would be known, for reasons which those who remember his conversation with Dennis Avory will understand and appreciate.

He suggested the Lakes, and Jenny nodded her head. She knew that Cecil Halford's home was there. It was she who asked her father to take her to Patterdale.

When her father was out on the long walks he took alone while she was resting, Jenny inquired of the Patterdale folks about the Hermitage, and learnt all about the Halfords.

She saw the house where Cecil lived, and the morning that she had persuaded her father to take her for a stroll past the house she saw a beautiful young lady in the garden.

Tom Verity had told her of his odd adventure, and she had taken a keen interest in the details—an interest which he attributed to his powers of humorous narration.

When Jenny saw the young lady smile at her father and nod to him pleasantly, she asked him if that was Miss Alison.

"Yes, that's the young lady. I wish you could see the Captain. I'll go and ask how he is."

"No, father, not now," said Jenny, "because — the walk has tried me. Let me go home—home to London —I shall be better when I get to work again—much better."

So they went home the next day and Jenny returned to the Academy, and Cecil Halford heard from her girl friends whom he met in Regent Street that she was back, and that she was expected at the concert that evening.

And so at nine o'clock he stood at the corner of Hanover Street, hesitating. He wanted to see her again —to speak to her if only for a moment. But he felt that it would be cowardly to do so—unless he obeyed her and called upon her father.

"I can't"—he said to himself at last, with a groan. "It's impossible—a man who sings in the streets. Good heavens! who would have thought that a pretty, lady-like girl like that—a girl at the Royal Academy—would have a father who played the banjo on a racecourse for a living?"

His brown study had come to an end, and he was just going to stroll away, when a hand was brought down heavily on his shoulder. Cecil Halford looked up and recognised the owner, a dark, distinguished-looking man, who might have been any age between forty and fifty, and had the unmistakable cut and appearance of "a man about town."

"Halloa, Westhropp," he said, "where are you off to?"

"I'm going as far as the Criterion. Come along. I have to meet a man there, and then I'm going back to my chambers. We're going to have some baccarat."

Cecil Halford shook his head. "No, thanks," he said, "I've had enough of that."

"Oh, nonsense—you shouldn't leave off when you lose—leave off when you win, my boy. Besides, I want to introduce you to a chap who'll be there—but perhaps you know him?"

"Who is he?"

"Lord Charlton. He's one of the right sort—one of the best. You ought to know him, really—sort of chap might be useful to you one day."

Cecil Halford hesitated. He didn't relish going back to his rooms and spending a lonely evening. He knew that it would be a merry party at Westhropp's, and he wanted something to help him to forget his worries.

And, after all, it was time his luck turned. He might win enongh to tide him over a little affair that was getting very close to its "logical termination."

CHAPTER XI

A LADY IN THE CASE

THERE was a savoury smell in the Chipchase domestic interior, from which the meanest intelligence would have gathered that the Chipchases were *going* to have something hot for supper.

When Lobelia, who had been sent to the public-house for the beer, kicked the front door open after the manner of young ladies accustomed to going errands and returning with both hands full, two little boys who were playing about the street long after little boys ought to have been in bed caught the fragrant odour of that "something hot" as it floated forth and sniffed it slowly. Your real London gamin when he smells cooking, whether it be through the gratings of a private area or outside a cook-shop, always inhales the odour discreetly. He doesn't waste any of it. He lets the delicious and appetising fragrance penetrate his nostrils slowly. I have been told by little boys whom I have questioned on the subject that you can, by a peculiar method of inhalation, get a distinct taste of nearly everything that is hot in a cook-shop.

The reader who has caught the full fragrance of fried fish when passing along a side street late in the evening will doubtless be able to corroborate a portion of this statement. It is quite possible to get enough of this odour to take away your appetite for anything else.

A hot supper was no novelty at the Chipchases'. Every evening at eleven o'clock old Sam Chipchase came home to his domestic hearth and his supper, and he was not to be put off with cold scraps or the thinly-sliced delicacies of the ham and beef shop.

The supper party generally consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Chipchase and Lobelia, Jim not getting in till after the West End theatre work was over.

But on this particular evening there was a surprise in store. Mrs. Chipchase had placed a smoking dish of

savoury stew upon the table, Lobelia had poured out the beer, and Sam had just drawn his chair up to the festive board and groaned heavily with imaginary rheumatic pains, when the door was flung open and in walked Jim.

Sam Chipchase stared, and let his uplifted knife and fork, which were just prepared for action, fall again. Mrs. Chipchase exclaimed, "Lor, Jim! why, whatever brings you home at this time?" And Lobelia, whose face and hair had begun to show signs of a long day's wear and tear, darted into the back room and made herself straight," which she did with the aid of a ragged towel damped at the corner for her face, and the palms of her hands for her hair. Then, having glanced in a little square of looking-glass which she had bought at a barrow for a penny, she returned to the front room and gazed admiringly at Jim, who had dropped into a chair and was enjoying the surprise which his unexpected arrival to supper had caused.

"I know what it is, Jim," said his father; "you've had the mare down or smashed a shaft. I've always told you you'd come to grief one day, the pace as you goes on that beastly ashfelt."

"No, father," replied Jim, pulling Lobelia's knife and fork over to his corner of the table and holding out a plate for some stew. "The mare's in the stable as right as a trivet, and the two shafts is well and hearty as thank goodness this leaves me at present."

Lobelia laughed aloud. "Lor, Jim!" she said, "you are funny—no mistake—you're 'nuff to make a cat die o' larfin'."

Jim nodded pleasantly to his cousin. "Yes," he said, "I'm told as I wasn't behind the door when humour was served out; but I ain't crackin' no jokes to-night. I've retired from business at this early hour of the evenin' owing to the smiles o' fortune."

"Oh, I know!" said Lobelia, clasping her hands, "somebody as you've drove regular, Jim, 'as died and left you money."

"No, Lobelia. Nobody ain't died and left me no money, but somebody as was very much alive when I saw him last has left me a bit o' paper."

Old Sam Chipchase looked across at his son. "Jim,"

he said, "I don't understand the slang as you young fellows talks nowadays. What's a bit o' paper?"

"I'm not talking shoful slang, guv'nor," answered Jim, laying down his knife and fork, and taking the glass of ale which Lobelia had poured out for herself, but had forgotten to touch in the rapture caused by being permitted to sit opposite Jim at supper and hear him converse. "When I says a bit o' paper, I mean what I says in the ordinary Christian tongue as is used by the Royal Family, the 'ouses o' Parleyment, and the landed gentry—only on this particular bit o' paper there was writin.'"

"Why don't you say what you found, Jim, and have done with it," exclaimed his mother sharply, "and let your father get on with his supper?"

"It's all right, mother, there's no 'urry. The writing on the paper being so to speak come into my possession surreptitious, the dockyment is impounded by order of the court, and the case will be heard in camerer before me and father."

Sam Chipchase finished his supper, rose from the table, groaned as a matter of habit, and taking his pipe from the mantelshelf filled it.

"Meaning, Jim," he said, after a moment's thought, "as you've found a letter or something in the cab as is of a private natur'?"

"You've guessed it in once, father. Which being of a private natur' is not to be revealed to women folk."

"I'm sure I don't want to know what the letter's about," said Mrs. Chipchase, bristling up; "but if you wants to keep it a secret I wouldn't tell your father much about it—for if ever there was a human sieve it's him."

"That's true, Maria," said Sam, lighting his pipe, "it's a sieve I am if you say so. But a sieve only lets out little things and keeps the big 'uns in, and that's what I do. I tells you a bit now and then, my dear, but I don't tell you everything."

Mrs. Chipchase rose from the supper table and began to busy herself about the room. She was a woman who always kept herself going and everybody else. Susan

Cutts, Lobelia's mother, always declared that the day her sister married Sam Chipchase she turned out a room and scrubbed it in her old home before she went to the church, and began to dust the "new home" to which her husband took her after the ceremony before she'd got her wedding bonnet off.

Lobelia, who would have been quite content to sit on and only gaze at Jim, who was lolling back in his chair and filling the apartment with the delicate aroma of a "twopenny smoke," toyed with as much supper as she had been able to secure in order to linger at the table; but her aunt, who was clattering plates and washing-up things in the little back kitchen, broke in upon her reveries.

"Now then, Lobelia, you be off upstairs. I can do all as there is to do now. And no laying in bed in the morning, my girl, or you'll hear of it. Off you go!"

What Lobelia would have liked to say to her aunt in reply she said afterwards to herself when she was safely shut in her little bedroom, and had artfully spread a folded towel against the door, so that her aunt should not see the candle-light shining through the cracks. For Lobelia kept a private candle or two of her own in her bedroom, and wandered in the land of cheap romance long after the rest of the household were asleep.

As soon as they were alone, Jim drew his chair up to his father by the fire, and, jerking his thumb towards the door through which his mother had retired for the night, he unfolded his mystery.

He had driven a gentleman to the City and back to the West End. After the gentleman had paid him he had found a letter in the cab. It was about that letter he wanted to consult his father, who, in spite of his being old-fashioned and driving a four-wheeler, had a shrewd business head on his rheumatic shoulders.

Jim handed the letter to the old gentleman, and the old gentleman put on his glasses, read it carefully, and then looked thoughtfully at Jim.

"Seems to me, Jim," he said, "as if Scotland Yard was the place for this."

"But it's a private letter addressed to a man by

name. If I could find that man, oughtn't I to take it to him?"

"Well, there ain't much doubt that the owner 'ud prefer it that way, Jim."

"And pay handsome for the trouble I'd been put to in findin' him?"

"Pay very handsome if he could afford it, Jim. But how are you going to find out who this 'ere Clement Hansell is? There's no address, and you didn't pick him up or drive him to any—unless," exclaimed Sam suddenly, seized with a brilliant idea, "unless you look in the Post-Office Dictionary."

"I did that. I had a look at one in the Coach and Horses: there was no Clement Hansell in that."

"Ah, then most likely he's not a gentleman or a business man, but one of the wrong sort, Jim. After all, that isn't a letter as one of the right sort would have come to him, is it?"

"No, but still Mr. Clement Hansell is one of the right sort after all."

"You've found out who he is then?"

"Yes, by a haccident—the 'and o' Fate, as Lobelia calls it. I bought the *Star* to see the racin' results, and while I was glancin' over it, and havin' a cup o' tea in the shelter, blest if I didn't see the very name as I wanted."

"What! the name Clement Hansell?"

"Yes."

Jim rose and went to the little sofa, on which he had flung his overcoat when he came in, and took a folded *Star* from the pocket and brought it to his father, pointing with his finger to a particular portion of the paper.

"There—look at that."

Sam Chipchase faced round a little to let the lamp-light fall on the print, and read a paragraph slowly aloud.

"Mr. Clement Hansell, the South African millionaire, has taken No. — Grosvenor Place, for a town residence, and is expected to arrive in London shortly."

"What do you think of that, father?" said Jim. "He's a millionaire."

"And he's arrove," said Sam. "What are you goin' to do about the letter now, Jim?"

"Do—why, the straight thing—take an early opportunity of calling on him and sendin' up my card and sayin' I've come about a letter as was left in a cab. You bet he'll see me at once, for I should think that letter not bein' in his possession is on his mind."

"And suppose, when you see this millionaire, Jim, you find as he ain't the gent as you drove in your cab—somebody else might have got hold of it, you know, and dropped it?"

"Not likely," said Jim, "but at any rate Mr. Hansell would be glad to have it, for it's addressed to him, and it gives him pretty considerably away. Halloa, what's that?"

A latch-key had turned in the lock of the front door, Jim Chipchase opened the room door, and Stephen Alison, who had come in, passed him and went on upstairs.

"Oh, that's our top-floor, is it?" he said to his father, as he turned back into the room. "He looks like a gentleman, father."

"Haven't you seen him before?"

"Not to notice him—or togged up like that. It's a rum go his livin' in our little room and doing the toff out o' doors. I wonder what his lay is? I must keep a look-out for him down West."

CHAPTER XII

A SPORTING CLUB

It was two o'clock in the morning when Cecil Halford stopped at the corner of a street running out of Shaftesbury Avenue and held out his hand to his companion, a tall, pale-faced young man with a straggling, sandy moustache, and sandy, closely cropped hair.

"I'll bid you good night now," said Halford, "I'm going home."

"That be hanged for a tale!" exclaimed his friend,

with a thickness in his speech that told its own tale. "Come into the Den."

"No, thank you. I—I'm not a member."

"What's that matter? I am, and I'll take you. It's a real good place, lots of the right sort. Come along."

Cecil hesitated, but his companion took his arm, and they went together to a house at the bottom of the street. Pushing open the door, they entered a small hall. A short, thick-set man in uniform came forward. The man had a bulldog face, a broken nose, and a nasty scar extended half-way down his right cheek. When he opened his mouth to smile at the new-comers. he showed that he was wofully deficient in the matter of front teeth.

"Good evening, my lord," he said, touching his forehead with his forefinger.

"Halloa, Bill!" exclaimed his lordship, "you're all right again, then?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the man, with a grin that made him look more villainous than ever, "I've been back again more nor a week. The young gentleman behaved handsome, paid my doctor's bill and gave me twenty for myself, and the governor's give me full salary all the time I was away, so I ain't done so bad."

Lord Charlton, the new-comer, nodded, and motioned Cecil Halford to follow him into the club-room.

"That's old Barney Burroughs," he said. "He's been a fine chap in his time—there wasn't a man his weight he couldn't knock out in six rounds once, but he put on flesh too fast and went wrong in the wind, and we put him on as doorkeeper here."

"He looks as though he'd been doing a bit of fighting lately," said Halford. "That scar's recent, isn't it?"

"Oh, he didn't get it fighting. That was done by one of our members—little Tommy Thompson —awfully nice chap, but a fearful idiot when he gets lively. He was having a nice little game at Aunt Sally, throwing champagne bottles at another fellow's hat stuck on the top of an umbrella, and poor old Barney got in the way and stopped a bottle with his

face. Of course Tommy was awfully sorry, but he's behaved jolly handsomely. Come on, let's go and have a drink at the bar—I've got a throat like a lime-kiln."

They had entered a large room at the end of which was a long bar. The men lolling about and drinking were mostly young gentlemen in evening dress. But one or two of the older members were unmistakably of a different order.

Lord Charlton saw at once that his friend, whose acquaintance he had made at the card-table in Mr. Westhropp's chambers a few nights previously, was new to this phase of London life, so he pointed out the celebrities.

There was no class distinction in the election of members of the "Den." Bookmakers, sporting publicans who found the money for prize-fighters, popular comedians, Bohemian journalists, and money-lenders were among the constant habitués, and the golden youth enjoyed their society and thought it rather a fine thing to be allowed to pay for drinks for them. The "sporting division" made much of the golden youth, for they—the sporting division—had a keen eye for business.

One or two of the members objected to the money-lenders, but their reasons were purely selfish. They had exhausted their credit with them, and were in the unpleasant position of being pressed for payment.

Lord Charlton was evidently a popular member of the club. Nearly everybody present had a word for him, and one or two inquired when he was off to America.

"Oh, soon now," his lordship replied. "I'm waiting for a fellow to go with me, that's all. Jack Darvell says he knows the very man. I was to have met him last week, but Jack had to run out of town, and the dinner was postponed. I'm to see him to-morrow evening, I believe."

"How are you going to do about old Gaygold, Charley?" said a young fellow, bringing his glass from the other end of the counter and joining Charlton and Halford. "Will you have to square up with him first?"

"No, I've given the old shark my life policy, and he's behaved jolly well for him. He's introduced me to

another shark, who's lent me a couple of thou. on my note of hand."

"You ought to be able to get money easily enough, Charley," said another member, joining them. "Can't understand why you want it, with your prospects."

"Yes, I know all about my prospects, dear boy; but my father's a steady old file, and likely to live as long as Methuselah—and the beggars know it, and that's why they make me pay through the nose. But I shall be all right in a year or two. I'm going to steady up and pull myself round. I've started already, you know. Given up my chambers, sold my horses, and I'm living with my people till I start."

"Living with mother now, eh, Charley?" said the young fellow.

Cecil Halford, who was tired and sick at heart, for he had lost again far more than he could afford at cards that evening, and got himself into a worse plight than ever, had been on the point of bidding his new friend good night when he caught the name of Gaygold, and he stayed.

Presently Lord Charlton threw himself on to a sofa at the end of the room and told the waiter to bring him a brandy and soda, and then Halford broached the subject.

"I heard you mention Gaygold the money-lender," he said. "How do you find him in business?"

"Oh, I suppose he's as big a thief as any of them, but he suits me. Are you in with him?"

"Yes," said Cecil. "Not heavily, of course, because I'm not rich like you are—but I've borrowed money of him and I'm in a tight corner just now, and he's making himself objectionable."

"What's he doing—writting you?"

"He hasn't done anything yet—because the bill's only a couple of days overdue—but he's talking some absurd nonsense about criminal proceedings."

Lord Charlton looked at his new acquaintance suspiciously out of the corner of his eye.

"H'm!—that's nasty," he said. "But how can he do it? Talks about 'false pretences,' I suppose—that's the old dodge to frighten youngsters."

"Yes," replied Cecil, with a slight quiver of the lip—"of course it's utter rot, but he"—he checked himself suddenly—"but after all I've no business to bother you with my private affairs."

"No, old chap—and if you'll take a tip from a man who knows the ropes, you won't talk about criminal charges in a club among men who don't know you."

Cecil Halford's face flushed crimson. He saw that his foolish confession had aroused suspicion in his companion's mind, and he replied with a certain amount of hauteur.

"I'm obliged to you for the hint," he said. "I forgot that you have only met me twice at a card-table at another man's chambers. But you have introduced me into your club, and you have a right to know something more about me."

He took a case from his pocket and handed Lord Charlton a card. "There is my name and my address when I am at home," he said. "My father is an Army man, and we are an old Westmorland family."

Lord Charlton took the card and read:—

"MR. CECIL HALFORD,
THE HERMITAGE, PATTERDALE."

Then he put it into his waistcoat pocket and laughed.

"That's all right, old chap," he said. "No harm meant, you know—only giving you a bit of friendly advice. Don't talk about criminal charges being made against you among strangers—of course everybody knows old Gaygold's a thundering thief, but he's not a fool—and if he *can* bring such a charge *you* must have been one."

"I suppose I have," said the young man, with a sigh, "but I have done nothing to justify such a threat as this scoundrel makes, and I hope you believe me."

"Oh, of course—sorry if I've roughed you up the wrong way, but it was your own doing, old chap."

"I quite see that. And now, if you'll allow me, I'll say good night."

Cecil Halford bent his head to the young nobleman who had done him the honour of introducing him to the select society of the Den, and made his way out into the

street. Directly he felt that he was free from observation his self-control deserted him, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, what a fool I've been—what a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "But I'll be one no longer. "I'll go to my father and get him to help me out of my mess. I ought to have done it long ago. But I daren't tell him the truth. Poor old dad! He would never trust me again if he knew what a fool I'd made of myself."

He walked along thinking over the trouble that had come upon him, and presently his thoughts wandered back to his meeting with Jenny Verity, to the pleasant walks he had had with her, and then to the day when she bade him good-bye and refused to see him again until he had called on her father, a street musician. And now he forgot all about the street musician and only remembered Jenny and how pretty and charming she was, and what pleasure it gave him to listen to her sweet, soothing voice.

It was past three o'clock when he got to his place. He turned up the light in his sitting-room and saw a letter lying on the table. He opened it. It was not a long letter, but it meant a great deal to Cecil Halford:—

"Sir,—As you have not called upon me with the funds to meet your acceptance, I beg to say that I have this day communicated with your father, Captain Halford, whose indorsement is on your bill, in order that he may have an opportunity of remitting before I proceed to extremities.—Yours obediently,

"Sampson Gaygold."

Cecil Halford read the letter to the end, and his face grew ashy pale. "My father's indorsement!" he said. "My father never wrote it. That is the false pretence he means, then! But I wrote my father's name and address on the back of the bill openly in my own hand, at Gaygold's request, and there was no pretence—he wanted it as a reference, he said. And now the scoundrel has the impudence to say that the bill bears my father's

indorsement—and he's written to him! I must go to my father at once and explain everything. He *must* believe me. But if he doesn't—if he thinks——"

With a low cry he sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XIII

THE "WHEEL OF FORTUNE"

THROUGH the grimy windows of the "Wheel of Fortune" there fell upon the broken pavement of Jutson Street a faint yellow light. The yellow light had a desperate struggle to get through at all, for, unlike his West End confrères, the landlord of the "Wheel of Fortune" didn't believe in show, and the gas-jet in the window was never turned on to its full capacity.

The modern gin-palace of the main thoroughfares is a magnificent building elaborately decorated and almost blinding in the brilliancy of its illumination. See such a place on a busy night when it is crammed with a noisy crowd of men and women, and the first thing that strikes you is the contrast between the dirty, miserably clad mob of drinkers and their gorgeous surroundings. A wrinkled old woman in rags counts out with her trembling hand the coppers for her gin, and the ceiling to which she raises her eyes is a blaze of gold.

The greasy-coated, unshaven loafer, with a face as black as the dirty pipe between his teeth, lolls against a wall elaborately tiled with dainty shepherdesses and handsome troubadours. The shiftless, thriftless workman, whose wages go regularly over the counter of the public-house, while his wife is in rags and his children roam the streets, leans his elbow upon a solid mahogany counter and stares with blinking eyes at a smiling goddess pouring the wealth of the world from the horn of plenty.

But there are none of these violent contrasts to be found in the "Wheel of Fortune." Here the surroundings suit the customers and the customers suit the surroundings.

The "Wheel of Fortune" stands in a dark, dimly-lighted street in the neighbourhood of the rapidly disappearing Mint. Once a crowded area with an evil reputation, the hand of the demolisher has of late years been busier here than anywhere. Hundreds of slums and rookeries have been swept away for modern improvements and commercial buildings, and poverty and vice have been thrust back and jammed into the few remaining streets and alleys.

Jutson Street is one of the worst of these slums. It is a street in which after dark no one who has anything to lose would care to venture, for Jutson Street is surrounded by a dozen other streets all exactly like it, and as the nearest lamp is round the corner, and the inhabitants show no light in their windows and burn none in their halls, the stranger is hopelessly lost without a guide.

If he turned into another street he would be as badly off, for the other streets are only a part of a maze, and if by accident he turned up one of the courts he would be worse off still, for in these courts are tenement houses inhabited by ladies and gentlemen who are generally described as belonging to "the dangerous classes."

The "Wheel of Fortune" is wrapped in gloom, and you can slip in and out of the swing doors without exposing your features to the inquisitive glance of the passers-by. If you don't want to come out into the street, you can go out at the back into a court, and through that court into another court, and so into a network of tenement houses, where only the School Board officer in search of a non-attending child could find you out.

If in one of these places a man is "wanted," no policeman would venture to come after him alone. There would be a little party of three or four, and they would come at a time when they were likely to take their prey unawares and without attracting the attention of the neighbours. They would be guided in these matters by the "nark," or informer, who had revealed to them the whereabouts of the person wanted.

Business is not particularly brisk at the "Wheel of

Fortune," because the people who use the house are not usually in receipt of regular wages. Rough men and miserable-looking women, stunted youths with white, evil-looking faces, draggle-tailed girls with black eyes and scratched arms, slouch in and drink; but there is no gaiety, no brightness, no noise.

The conversation is rarely general unless there has been a fight between the Jutson Street gang and a gang from another part of the Mint. Then there is a little extra excitement. But on ordinary occasions the people in the dingy bar stand in little groups and talk below their voices, and are all very respectful to the landlord, a burly man of about sixty with a shaven face and closely cropped grey hair.

Mr. Benjamin Gooch—Ben Gooch his customers call him—does the bulk of his trade single-handed. When business is brisk his wife, a quiet, depressed little woman of about forty, assists. But Mr. Gooch knows better than to employ a potman or a barmaid at the "Wheel of Fortune."

The customers wouldn't like it, and he himself would find it inconvenient, for among Mr. Gooch's regular clients are several members of the criminal classes, and Mr. Gooch has occasional interviews with some of them in a little back parlour, and is always willing when he knows his man to purchase small articles of jewellery, or to arrange with a friend for the disposal of plate and articles of value.

There are barrels in Mr. Gooch's cellars which would seriously disappoint the thirsty man who tapped them in search of liquid refreshment.

On this special evening when I have taken the liberty of bringing the reader down Jutson Street, and introducing him to the proprietor of the "Wheel of Fortune," Mr. Gooch is leaning against the back of the bar in his shirt-sleeves smoking a beautifully coloured meerschaum pipe, and gazing at the big rings of smoke in a contemplative manner. But every now and then, when the door is pushed open, he looks round eagerly as though he expected some one. Presently, when the place is almost empty, he lounges up to the corner of the bar at which a sturdily built man of forty, in a pilot jacket

and peaked cap, with a blue bird's-eye "fogle" round his throat, is finishing a pot of beer.

"Wot time was you to meet him, Joe?" asks the landlord, under his voice.

"Nine o'clock, he said."

Mr. Ben Gooch pulled out a handsome gold watch—he was the only man in Jutson Street who could wear one with impunity—and looked at it.

"It's nearly half-past now. 'Tain't often as the Dook's behind his time. Hadn't you better go across and see if he's at his place?"

"No. I've got my orders—I'm to wait here. If the Dook had meant me to come to his place, he'd a said so last night. He'll be here, you bet your life on——"

Joe Huggett didn't finish the sentence. At that moment the Duke slouched in, nodded to the landlord, called for a pint, and looked quickly round at the company. Satisfied that there was nobody in the bar likely to be interested in his conversation, he turned to the landlord.

"Fine night, Ben—How's business?"

"Oh, quiet," replied the landlord, putting the beer down on the counter.

"Ah—well, here's t'ords you." The Duke nodded to the landlord and then dropped into conversation with his friend. "I've fixed it up all right, Joe."

"Is it to-night?"

"Yes—you come round to my place now. We'd better be goin'." He looked across at the landlord and gave him a sign.

Mr. Benjamin Gooch came and leant over the counter. The two or three people who had been hanging about had finished their refreshment and gone out

"I'm going to try to-night," said the Duke; "but it's a big job, and I'm not going to bring it off if things don't seem right. I'd sooner wait a night or two. I know where the safe is, and I can go to it blindfold, but the young chap's took to comin' 'ome later than usual, and we want to see him in first. If he was to come in while we was on the premises it might queer the thing altogether."

"You're sure the stuff's there?" said Mr. Huggett.

"Certain. The old gal's jewellery's always in the house when she's in town. The old toff's valet told me so."

"Yes!" said the landlord, "but he's had the sack over two years."

"But he's in with one of the maids still. I tell you it's all right. The stuff's there, and all we've got to do is to get it. I've been waiting for the job a month—not to make a mistake. I'd ha' done it long ago but for the fool of a young chap as will come home all hours o' the night. If he didn't come in a cab I could ha' given him one on the head as he was going in and had his key and walked in like a gentleman, but it's a bit risky. He's always in quick after the cabby drives off."

"You said he was always a bit on, Dook," said Joe Huggett—"he ought to be easy enough to tackle if that's right."

"Yes, I'd got it all nice and put up to work it through him, if I could have found the chap to pick him up and put him in a cab and take him to the hospital while we was helping ourselves to the swag, but it wants a gent, and a gent as could be trusted. I thought I'd got the very cove one night in Steve Alison, as did time with me at Portland, but he wouldn't take it on."

"But you've got some swell coves at work with you, you said, Dook," replied the landlord. "Couldn't they manage it for you?"

The Duke shook his head. "Not them. They're all right with the fine gentleman blackleg business, but they won't do the dangerous work. It wants an old lag for that."

"Well," said Mr. Benjamin Gooch, "if you bring it off I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get rid of the stuff for you and get you a fair price. Only being family jools they'll be known, and it will cost a bit. I'll have to send them abroad."

"I know that, else I shouldn't have come to you, for you ain't a Baron Rothschild with the shekels, governor. But this lot'll have to be got away out of the country quick. I ain't going to keep 'em about my place."

"That's all right, Dook—you do as I tell you. Bring 'em here to me in the morning and I'll give you as much

as anybody for 'em down, and half what they bring over afterwards."

"You'll get 'em out of the country at once—'fore the bills are out?" said the Duke.

"Six hours after you bring 'em to me, Dook, the chap as I shall work the job through 'ull be on the briny—and he'll have 'em all out o' their settings before he starts."

"All right—then it's a bargain—but don't make sure o' seein' me to-morrow or the day after or the day after that. We ain't going to run no risks by hurrying. But I'm going to try and bring it off to-night if I can. Come on, Joe, and we'll see to the tools. It's only the getting in as'ull be awkward. The safe's in the library, and the jewels are always locked up in it when the Countess ain't wearing of 'em. I've got a plan of the place all drawn out to work to, but we must have the tools right, and make it a quick job."

"Well, we've got the key all right," said Joe Huggett, laughing. "Lor, what a prutty job it is—the way as the Dook got a wax squeeze o' that key 'ud ha' been a credit to the old gent as he takes after about the dial."

"How did you get it, Dook?" asked the landlord.

"Never mind how. I got it—not the key, but the squeeze of it—and it didn't take me long to have one made."

A couple of lads looked in at the door and came to the counter. The Duke shook the remains of his beer round in the pot, drank it off, and motioning Joe Huggett to follow him, went out into the street. Turning up a narrow entry the two burglars made their way into a small, closed-in square at the top of a court. The Duke led the way to an open doorway and Joe followed him into the darkness.

"Be careful how you come, mate," cried the Duke as he felt his way—"there's no banisters, they're broke away."

At the top of the crazy stairs, the protecting banisters of which had long since been used as firewood by the tenants, the Duke opened a door, and striking a light, invited his associate to enter. The room was bare of

furniture except a deal table and a couple of chairs. In an inner room was a rough bedstead, a small deal table, and a broken Windsor chair.

These were the private apartments of "The Dook," a professional burglar, a man believed by the police to have been mixed up with some of the largest jobs of recent times.

The Duke had done his best to deserve the credit—and yet after a life spent in the pursuit of wealth with a jemmy and skeleton keys, he lived in a tenement house, in rooms the rent of which was four and sixpence a week.

But that was part of the Duke's cleverness. The rooms were only used by him for business purposes, He had a much more comfortable place at Hornsey, where he lived with his wife, who believed him to be a "traveller."

The burglar produced the implements of his trade from a corner where he had hidden them. He and his "pal" went carefully over them to see that they were all in good order, looked admiringly at the key they had had made to fit the safe, and then the two criminals discussed their plan of operations.

"There's only one thing I don't like, Dook," said Joe Huggett, "and it's what you say about this 'ere Lord What's-his-name——"

"Lord Charlton."

"This Lord Charlton a-coming in in the middle of the night."

"We must keep out of his way," said the Duke.

"Yes, but he may get into ours."

The Duke picked up a heavily weighted life-preserver and thrust it into the pocket of his overcoat.

"Well," he said, "if he does, I'll take care as he don't make no rude remarks."

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN'S THREAT

When Mr. Clement Hansell returned to his hotel he was in the best of possible spirits. He felt a younger man than he had done for some years past. He laughed to himself and muttered, "It's the good old remedy, I suppose—breathing your native air."

It wanted a quarter of an hour to the time he had ordered dinner. He was going to dine alone, so he thought he wouldn't take the trouble to dress.

The German waiter came into the sitting-room and laid the cloth with that absence of noise and fuss which makes the foreign servant a soothing influence in an English hotel.

Mr. Hansell looked at the man and liked him. It was a habit of his to like or dislike people at first sight—to trust or distrust them after an acquaintance of a few minutes.

The millionaire had no interest in the waiter, but he eyed him keenly from force of habit. He had amassed a fortune, in a country where every man is for himself, by never making a mistake with regard to the people he was likely to get the best of, or the people who were likely to get the best of him. He attributed his failure in England solely to his having taken advice with regard to his speculations from a man whose handshake spelt duplicity in the deaf and dumb language.

A man may make the deception of his fellows the study of a life-time, but he cannot give himself a false character when he shakes hands.

But Clement Hansell didn't want to shake hands when he was weighing people up. He looked into the eyes, noted the lines of the mouth, and listened to the voice, and knew at once whether they were likely to be useful to him or not.

He watched the waiter as he laid the table, and presently he spoke to him in German.

"You are a German?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been long in this country?"

"Six years."

"Then you speak English well?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Hansell did not continue the conversation. He had reckoned the waiter up. "Good, honest, straightforward fellow," he said to himself. "Well trained—been in private service probably. Won't go to the writing-table and turn over my letters if I'm out when he comes in to see to the fire."

The millionaire turned mechanically towards the fire as it came into his thoughts. The lower portion of the coal had burned into a deep red glow. There is hypnotic suggestion in that red glow, and few of us can look into it without letting our thoughts wander back to the past or forward to the future.

They were pictures of the past that Clement Hansell saw in the red hollow of the glowing embers. The sound of the German words had directed his thoughts into a certain channel.

He gazed between the bars and saw the face of a man he had known at the Cape when he was laying the foundation of the enormous fortune that was now his.

"Poor Max!" he said, "I had to do it. He'd have given the whole thing away in his blundering honesty. But how was I to know that the poor fellow would die in prison?"

The scene to which his memory carried him back as he gazed into the fire enacted itself once more before him. He saw himself a fugitive from the old land, striving desperately to reconquer fortune in the new. He had made soon after his arrival the acquaintance of a German, Max Freiligrath, a handsome, stalwart young fellow, who had come to the Cape to seek his fortune. Hansell, who had been educated abroad, spoke German fluently, and the two became friends. The elder man was not slow to see that Freiligrath had energy and business ability, and the two became partners.

Then came the first chance and a lucky deal with some property that promised to be of considerable value.

But John Alison—or to call him by the name in which he booked his passage from London, and by which he was known at the Cape, Clement Hansell—had been doing some illicit diamond-buying, and had got together sufficient money to trade on his own account, and to dissolve a partnership in which Freiligrath's strict honesty might be a drawback. It seemed to Hansell that it would be to his interest to get rid of his partner as speedily as possible.

He did it in a way that served a double purpose. It not only dissolved the partnership, but it saved Hansell himself at an exceedingly critical moment. Diamonds that had been illicitly bought were cleverly planted on to Freiligrath, and when his room was searched some were found concealed there. Freiligrath protested that he was innocent, but the evidence was strong against him. Hansell took care that it should be so. Freiligrath was condemned to a long term of imprisonment. He died soon after the commencement of his sentence.

Two years afterwards, when Clement Hansell had begun to amass wealth, he received a letter from England, a letter from a woman who said that she had been the affianced wife of Max Freiligrath, who had sent a message to her declaring that the man who had ruined him and flung an innocent man into gaol was Clement Hansell. The letter, written with all the vehemence of a broken-hearted woman to whom only revenge is left, went on to say that one day the sweetheart of the "murdered man" might meet the villain who had done this infamy, and then she would kill him.

Hansell guessed how it was that the letter had taken so long to reach him. The men who were convicted of buying diamonds of the Kaffirs were sent to the Breakwater, at Cape Town. There the newly-convicted men met the men whose term of punishment was approaching its end.

Hansell ascertained that among the convicts working with Freiligrath was a German, who, on his release, went to England. He felt convinced it was to this man that Freiligrath entrusted his message to the girl whose heart was breaking for him in London.

He could only account in that way for the two years

that had elapsed between the death of his former partner and his receipt of the threatening letter.

It was addressed simply to "Clement Hansell, Kimberley." But by that time his name was well known, and it was delivered to him at once.

At first it alarmed the recipient. He remembered that Freiligrath had told him that when he had made his fortune he was going to send for the girl to whom he was engaged to come out and join him. She was a girl from Max's own little Rhineland home, and was a governess in London.

In the pursuit of wealth, Clement Hansell had gradually forgotten the threat. But he had carefully preserved the letter. If at any time he heard of a Miss Catherine Weber being anywhere in his immediate neighbourhood he might, armed with that letter, make things exceedingly unpleasant for her. When he was coming to England he placed the letter in his pocket-book, and determined that one of his first tasks should be to ascertain if the lady was still a London governess, or if she had returned to her native land.

It is not difficult for a millionaire to have the people traced whose whereabouts he is anxious to discover. The two persons about whom he had to make inquiries were this woman and his brother Stephen. When he thought of Stephen his face changed and a look of uneasiness came into it. Such remnants of a conscience as he had left asserted themselves, and made him uncomfortable.

There is nothing annoys a man who can afford to be honest so much as the remembrance of a crime or a disgraceful act committed when he was not so comfortably circumstanced.

Clement Hansell knew what had followed after he had used his brother's fortune. He had read in the English papers the account of Stephen's trial and conviction. He had always intended if he got rich to find a way of returning the money. But he wanted to do it without giving Stephen an opportunity of tracing his whereabouts. Stephen's long term of penal servitude increased his brother's difficulty. When he grew rich he felt that he could not possibly open up communication with a convict,

and if he attempted to find out the address of the wife and child and communicate with them, he might establish a link between John Alison and Clement Hansell.

But now that his fortune was assured—now that he had realised his properties in South Africa, and had come back to London to play a new version of Monte Cristo—it was necessary above all things that Stephen should be compensated for his past sufferings. The seven years were not up, but it was quite possible that Stephen was out. At any rate, it would be easy to employ some one to make guarded inquiries in the proper quarter.

Mr. Hansell's further meditations were interrupted by the waiter, who entered with the soup. The millionaire made an excellent dinner and smoked a cigar after it, and then went out and spent the rest of the evening at the Alhambra.

The next day he replied to Dennis Avory's wire, and amused himself by going about London and visiting the show-places, which he enjoyed with the keen delight of a provincial on his first trip to town.

He was tired by the afternoon, and he returned to the hotel and lay down and rested. He had been walking about and climbing steps and stairs, and it had made him a little faint.

He remembered then that two years ago a doctor had told him not to take too violent exercise, or to give way to too great excitement, as his heart was not quite right.

Clement Hansell had been depressed at first by the idea that he wasn't sound, but the feeling had worn off. After all, he was not likely to have to go through any violent exercise, for he could afford to lead a life of leisure and to pay others to do the hurrying and worrying, and he didn't think anything was ever likely to excite him much now.

But the physical exertion of the day had found out the weak spot, and the millionaire was glad to lie down till dinner-time.

He thought he would go to a restaurant to dinner, and he went to the Café Royal. When he had finished dinner it was not yet ten o'clock. The night was fine when he turned out into Regent Street, and he made up his

mind to stroll as far as Grosvenor Place. He had not been there yet.

The house agent who had the matter in hand for him had at his request arranged for a house in which some of the servants could be left.

Mr. Hansell had no desire to go through the bother of finding a housekeeper and a staff of male and female servants immediately on his arrival in London. His heavy luggage had all been sent direct to Grosvenor Place, and so he might just as well call in and look over his new home, and let the servants know that they might expect him to take up his residence there shortly.

. . . . . .

When Mr. Hansell arrived at Grosvenor Place, there were difficulties in the way which he had not foreseen. His millionairey way of doing things had its disadvantages. The butler was exceedingly polite, but nervous. It was the first time he had seen the new tenant, and he had no means of identifying him.

When a strange gentleman comes at ten o'clock at night and wants to walk about a West End residence, a careful butler is naturally on his guard. London is a wicked place, and every day the gentlemanly swindler becomes more daring in his enterprises.

Clement Hansell laughed at the butler's hesitation.

"You're quite right to be careful," he said, "but as it is not yet publicly known that a Mr. Hansell has taken this house, I don't think you need doubt my identity."

"Oh, but it is known, sir," said the butler. "There's been a paragraph in one of the evening papers."

Clement Hansell frowned. "Ah," he said, "is that so? Then I shall probably come in earlier than I intended. Has my luggage arrived?"

"The luggage has arrived, sir."

"Then I can soon convince you that I am the owner of it. I have the keys of everything with me."

"Yes, sir—of course—but—well, sir, it's very awkward—and I'm sure you'll forgive me under the circumstances, but if you would call to-morrow with the agent——"

"The agent hasn't seen me—but I shall have no difficulty with him. I'll write to him to-night to come to me at my hotel to-morrow."

"Very well, sir, and the first thing in the morning I will send him the key."

"I see—you will give me possession through him—that's a perfectly business-like arrangement, and I am glad to find that I am retaining the services of such a careful and responsible man."

"Thank you, sir, but I'm leaving to-morrow. I explained to Mr. Jones, the agent, that I should have to go, and he has engaged a highly respectable man in my place. That won't matter, sir, as when you come again you'll come with the agent and have the key, and he will put matters right and see you properly settled, sir. You see, sir, you weren't expected here for another week."

As Clement Hansell walked back to his hotel, although he was slightly annoyed, he could not help laughing at the absurdity of the situation. He had quite forgotten when he gave cable instructions, through a Johannesburg house to an agent in London, to secure him a furnished mansion at the West End, that nobody in London knew him. However, he would speedily be able to put that right by the papers in his possession.

When he reached his hotel he sat down and wrote a line to the agent, asking him to obtain the key of the house in Grosvenor Place, and send it over to him on the following day. He rang the bell for the waiter, and gave him the letter to put in the post-box, and told him to bring a whisky and seltzer.

"There'd better be no mistake about my getting the key," he thought to himself, "and the sooner I get the agent to call here and convince himself that I am Clement Hansell, the better. It was an odd idea of the butler's, that some swindler might pass himself off as me, but such things have been done before now. Clement Hansell is entirely unknown to any one in England. The manager of this hotel is at the present moment practically the only person who could identify me."

The German waiter returned with the whisky.

"And the waiter," added Mr. Hansell to himself.

The waiter opened the seltzer, and Mr. Hansell began to talk to him in German again.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Otto Muller, sir."

"Are you a Berliner?"

"No, sir, I am a Rheinlander."

"Ah—what part?"

"I am from Rudesheim—the Herr may know it."

Clement Hansell started. Rudesheim had been the home of Max Freiligrath. It was at Rudesheim that Max had fallen in love with Catherine Weber, before she went to London to earn her living as a governess.

CHAPTER XV

LORD CHARLTON'S COMPANION

The little dinner at Jack Darvell's, which had been postponed for nearly a week owing to the host having had to leave town suddenly "on business," had been a merry affair. There were only three guests besides Lord Charlton and Mr. Stephens, and they were all young fellows who had made Darvell's acquaintance since he had married Molly Mallandaine. One of them had already been on the expedition which Lord Charlton contemplated, and gave him a considerable amount of useful information.

The party broke up about eleven, the three young fellows having other engagements, but Lord Charlton and Mr. Stephens and their host remained to have a chat by themselves.

Stephen Alison had laid himself out to be agreeable to the young nobleman, and Jack Darvell felt that the first step towards success had been taken.

Stephen had arrived early and had had a private conversation with his host. In pursuit of the plan which he had formed, he had been eager to give Darvell the impression that he was perfectly willing to carry out his share in the diabolical plot. He had confessed that

things were desperate with him, and that his only hope of ever enjoying the luxuries of life again lay in his embarking on a further career of crime.

But he took care to play his hand carefully. He pointed out the risks he was running in taking an active part in the "accident" which was to make the life policy for £20,000 payable to the person to whom it had been assigned. He led Darvell on to explain minutely the precautions which he and Gaygold had taken, and he learnt enough to make him master of the situation when the time arrived for him to play the trump card.

Between his first interview with Darvell and the date of the postponed dinner party, Stephen Alison had thought the whole business out. He saw that this trip to America would be an escape from the sufferings and humiliations which must constantly be his if he remained in England. He saw also that his only chance of proving the guilt of the scoundrels whom he was determined to unmask and bring to justice lay in his going through the business, up to a certain point, in such a manner as would give them the utmost confidence in his value as a confederate.

If Lord Charlton accepted his services as a companion, he would leave England with him, and then the young nobleman would be safe, and he, Stephen, would take his own time in allowing the confederates to forge the links of the chain of evidence against themselves.

But if Lord Charlton did not engage him, and Darvell found some one else among the desperate men with whom he was in touch to undertake the infamous task, then Stephen had made up his mind that he would go to Sergeant Verity instantly and place the matter in his hands.

When the three men were left alone, Darvell, without any beating about the bush, asked Lord Charlton plainly what he thought of this introduction.

"Well, Charley, old chap," he said, "I've brought you two fellows together to see what you think of each other. Stephens, to whom I've explained matters fully, is quite willing to go with you, but you understand you'll have to stand all the exes and compensate him for his

time, because he's not a rich man like you, but has to make his own income."

"That's all right, Darvell," replied Lord Charlton. "Your friend and I have been talking things over at dinner, and I think we understand each other. He's just the fellow I should like to travel with, and if he's agreeable, he's only just got to say so and the thing's settled."

"I'm quite agreeable," said Stephen. "In fact, it's the sort of thing I've been looking for for some time, and ——"

"It was because I knew that," interrupted Darvell, "that I thought of him, Charley, when you told me you didn't relish the idea of going alone."

The men sat discussing the great expedition on which Lord Charlton had set his heart until past midnight, and then Mrs. Darvell, who had been to the theatre, joined them, and the conversation took a different turn, and finally Lord Charlton rose to take his leave.

"You'll walk with me, perhaps," he said to Stephen. "I'm going home early to-night for a change. Come to my house, and we can settle everything in a brace of shakes."

Stephen Alison bade Mr. and Mrs. Darvell good night, and the two men went out together.

"Look here, old chap," said Charlton, when they were outside. "I don't want to put you in a corner, but I want to get away quick. I've had a pretty bad time lately, and my nerves are all wrong. I'm sick of London. I've sold off my place and my horses and things, and I'm staying with the old folks at home, as the nigger song says. I'm on the fidget to get off now because I'm unsettled, and when I'm on the fidget I'm no good to myself or anybody else. When can you start?"

"Whenever you like," said Stephen. "The only thing is, of course, I haven't prepared for the trip yet—I shall have to make certain arrangements myself—and——" he hesitated.

"I understand, old chap—in a tight corner, eh? I've been there myself many a time, and I know what it is. You want a bit on account for preliminary expenses, eh—is that it?

Stephen nodded. "It's no good mincing matters," he said; "we're making a business arrangement, and I must treat it in a business-like way. I haven't the money to spare to get the things I shall want for a long trip like this."

"That's all right, and in the contract. Come along to my place now, and—will a hundred do you?"

"Yes, a hundred will buy what I want, and leave me a bit over."

"Very well, I'll give it you, in notes if you like. I won a couple of hundred ready last night at the club, and I've got it at home."

Stephen had hesitated to ask for the money, but it was impossible that he could proceed further without it. The fiver that Darvell had given him at the restaurant was now gone all but a few shillings.

He would have no scruple in taking the money. He was going to earn it—to render a service for it—how great a service the man who walked by his side little imagined.

The ex-convict looked at his companion once or twice with curious eyes. The knowledge of the plot of which the young nobleman was the centre oppressed him. They passed men and women in the streets who took no notice of them. If these men and women only knew the truth, Stephen thought, how shocked and horrified they would be. Here were two men walking quietly along together, smiling and chatting amiably, and yet to all intents and purposes one had been specially engaged to murder the other.

At the corner of Grosvenor Place the policeman on duty recognised Lord Charlton and touched his helmet to him. The incident was an ordinary one, but under the circumstances that also appealed to Stephen Alison's imagination.

The policeman had given his ordinary greeting to a man against whose life there was a plot. And the hired assassin walked by his side.

Every day the great mysteries of London's Heart throb unheeded. The honest man and the criminal, the knave and the fool, the murderer and his intended victim, touch elbows and pass in silence. In the hurry-

ing crowd that throngs Regent Street or Bond Street there are actors and actresses in life dramas that would hold us spell-bound if we read them in a book — in tragedies that would thrill us and horrify us if we saw them on the stage.

But to us and to every one else in the street they are nothing out of the common. They are passers-by.

Stephen Alison and Lord Charlton that night were passers-by. But on the morrow there would be plenty of people who had taken little notice of them who would remember to have seen them. The policeman would remember them at once — there would be a cabman—a young man and his sweetheart walking home together—a loafer leaning against the lamp-post with his hands in his pockets—dozens of people who would recall the couple they scarcely spared a glance for now.

Lord Charlton stopped at a house near the end of Grosvenor Place.

"Here we are," he said. "My people will have gone to bed by this time. My father's always an early bird, and the mater was out at a ball till four this morning, and she'll be repairing the ravages of late hours with a beauty sleep to-night. They never let any of the men sit up for me," he added, with a laugh, "because my hours are habitually disgraceful."

He felt in his pocket for his latch-key, found it, and opened the door, and Stephen Alison, the ex-convict, entered the mansion of the Earl and Countess of Powick as a guest. As he did so a man who was standing in the shadow on the opposite side of the road strolled quietly off. Fifty yards away he met another man who was walking up and down watching the black shadow of a sauntering policeman.

As the two men met they stopped. "Give me a light for my pipe, mate, will you?" said the one.

The other ostentatiously drew a box of matches from his pocket, sheltered the light with his hand, and then held it to the smoker's pipe.

"The young's toff's just gone in, Dook," he said; "but he's got a cove with him."

"That's awkward, Joe," replied the Duke. "Get back and watch till the cove comes out again, and then let me

know. If he don't come out in an hour we won't risk it to-night."

"All right, Dook. Shall I find you here again?"

"No; it ain't safe. The slop yonder's a young 'un, and he ain't tired o' playing with his bull's-eye yet. You keep moving about when you hear his boots coming. I'll go over by the Park gate and wait till you come to me."

CHAPTER XVI

MY BOY CECIL

When Dennis Avory called again at the Hermitage he explained to Captain Halford that Mr. Clement Hansell did not desire him to commence his duties at present, and so he should be able to prolong his stay at Patterdale for a few days. He hoped he did not bore the Captain, but it was a pleasant walk from his sister's, and he thought he might as well call himself to make inquiries as send a servant.

"That's a very elaborate apology for your visits, which I am sure are very welcome, Mr. Avory," replied the Captain, whose ankle now only inconvenienced him when he suddenly remembered that he was an invalid. "I'm pleased to see you. Come when you like. I've been shut up here so long without the sound of a man's voice that I'm beginning to get effeminate. You'll come in one day and find me doing crochet-work, or knitting socks for the poor, or working slippers for the curate. A man who lives entirely in female society gets that way, I believe, in time. Shouldn't wonder if I ended by climbing on a chair and screaming when I see a mouse."

"Well, I'm sorry we didn't meet before you had the accident," said Dennis, "we might have had some pleasant walks together.

"Don't talk about it—I don't suppose I shall ever take a decent walk again—I shall go about a hundred yards with a hop, skip, and a jump, and then have to sit down.

I daresay I shall end my days being dragged about in a donkey chaise, with a man leading the animal, for I couldn't drive it. No; I don't care what happens, I will *not* drive a donkey. It is not a soldierly occupation, and I should look confoundedly ridiculous—especially if the animal refused to go. I should lose my temper and hit it. Some old maiden lady would pass and see me—summon me for cruelty. Imagine me, sir, summoned for cruelty to a donkey! Imagine the infamous articles there would be written in the Radical papers. What an ignoble end, sir, to a useful life—what an ignoble end!"

Dennis Avory smiled. "I don't think you'll come to the donkey chaise," he said. "You'll be able to get about in a few days, and you'll walk as well as ever."

"Never, sir—never! I shall be permanently lame—ankle always liable to go wrong after slightest exertion. I shall have to limp about with a stick. That's not active exercise, and I want active exercise to keep my weight down. I shall put on flesh rapidly—my poor father did—so did my mother—runs in the family. In a couple of years I shall weigh twenty stone—I shall wobble like a prize pig at a cattle show when I walk—I shall be a Daniel Lambert. I little thought once that I should end my days a Daniel Lambert!"

Dennis remembered that the Captain had already ended his days in a ditch, among the burning débris of a house, on the spike of a railing on a cold morning, and in a police-court, so that he did not extend any very great sympathy to his host on account of his impending obesity. He saw May and Mrs. Alison in the garden, and making an excuse to the Captain he went out to wish them good afternoon. It was pleasant out of doors, although winter was at hand. The weather had been exceptionally fine for the season, and the sun was still warm. May, who had learned from Dennis Avory that he was interested in dogs, asked him to come down to the gardener's shed and see a fox-terrier puppy that one of the villagers had given her. As the young man strolled down the garden, bending his head to listen to May, Mrs. Alison looked after them and sighed.

May had grown up into a beautiful girl. She had watched her with all a mother's love, and wondered

what would happen when some day a young man fell in love with her. At present May was Captain Halford's niece. The name of Alison had been associated by no one who visited them with the Alison who had been tried and sentenced as a criminal. But when an English gentleman fell in love with May there could be no concealment. The truth would have to be told—the sin of the father would have to be revealed to his child—and then——

Mrs. Alison had always stopped there. She had put the thought from her, not daring to picture the situation to the end. She did not imagine for a moment that Dennis Avory had fallen in love with May. But he evidently took pleasure in her society, and her quick mother's eye had not been slow to perceive that May by no means objected to Mr. Avory's company. She looked after the young couple for a minute, then she turned and went into the house to her brother.

The Captain was looking over a paper, the *County Gentleman,* and his attention had been arrested by the page advertisement of a manufacturer of invalid chairs. There were illustrations, and the Captain was gazing with a look of despair in his big blue eyes at a picture of a formidable machine on wheels.

"Look at this, Marion—look at it! That's the sort of thing I shall come to—you sit in it and push the wheels round with your hands. I suppose, after all, it will be better for me to have one of these machines, than to be summoned for cruelty to a donkey."

"Richard, whatever do you mean?" said Mrs. Alison, bending over and looking at the picture.

"That, my dear—that's what I mean. Imagine me, at my time of life, wheeling myself about in a thing like that! I suppose I shall be able to wear gloves to keep the mud off my hands; but it will be horribly dirty in bad weather. I shall be absolutely smothered—and I shall lose my temper with the confounded thing, and put too much energy on the wheels, and it'll run into a hedge and throw me out forwards—or it will run back into a ditch and throw me out backwards. I don't think I can risk it, Marion. I'll stop on the sofa till I weigh twenty stone, and die of dropsy; and you'll have

to have the window taken out to get my coffin out of the house into the hearse."

"O Richard, don't!" said his sister, with a shiver. "I don't want to hear you talk about your death, even in jest. What would become of us?"

"Oh, don't worry about that, my dear. Cecil's a good boy—Cecil will have the old place after me, but he won't turn you out. He'll let you live on here while he's a famous counsel up in London, saving thieves from gaol and murderers from the gallows, and helping rich railway companies to deprive innocent passengers of their legs and arms without paying them compensation. Don't worry about what's going to happen to me, my dear. My boy Cecil will obey my injunctions and look after May and yourself."

"Yes, dear—I am sure of that—but, Richard, there is something I want to say to you."

Captain Halford pushed the paper away, and limping to the sofa sat down on it, and signed to his sister to come and sit in the chair beside him.

"Richard," said Mrs. Alison, "May is a woman now. Some day a man may fall in love with her."

"There's no taste left among them if one doesn't," replied the Captain.

"And when that happens—when some one comes to you as her uncle, or to me as her mother—what are we to say?"

The Captain's face became serious. "I have thought of it often, Marion," he said. "More lately than ever."

"Why more lately, Richard?"

"Dennis Avory calls here every day. I'm not conceited old fool enough to imagine that he comes simply out of anxiety about my ankle, or to listen to my conversation."

"You think that he is interested in—that he is attracted by May?"

"Of course I do. I don't say that he's in love with her—a young man can like to talk to a pretty girl without wishing to be engaged to her—but for all that it is quite possible that if the acquaintance were to continue——"

"Richard, the same thought came to me just now. That is why I ask you. When the time comes that

May is wooed, and we have to give our consent, what are we to tell the man who wishes to make her his wife?"

"What can we tell him, Marion?" said the Captain gently. "Only the truth."

"And then?"

"The rest is not in our hands, Marion. We must hope for the best. Poor girl — poor little girl! We have kept it from her while we could, but sooner or later the shadow of her father's guilt will fall upon her pathway. Please God it may not remain there all her life!"

The tears came into Mrs. Alison's eyes and trickled down her cheeks. She knew the bitterest punishment to the man she loved—the man who had already suffered so much—would be the knowledge, if it ever came to him, that he had blighted his daughter's happiness. The Captain moved uneasily on the sofa. His sister's tears and the subject she had raised distressed him.

"Come, Marion," he said. "There's plenty of time yet. Confound it, for all we know, May is going to be an old maid. Come, don't cry, there's a good soul. I —I want to be merry. The doctor says I must keep my spirits up. If I get depressed my vitality gets low. I shall have some horrible nerve disorder. St. Vitus's dance, perhaps—waggle my head like a China mandarin, and clatter my knife and fork on the plate. In my present weak state I'm very likely to have melancholia or suicidal mania—it's in the family. A great-aunt of ours was always trying to hang herself with a stay-lace, or to drown herself in the water-butt, or to open a vein in her arm with a hairpin. Don't depress me, Marion—for goodness' sake don't depress me. I don't want to end my days hanging from the cornice-pole by a stay—er —I mean a boot-lace—though if I get to be twenty stone it would have to be a confoundedly strong one."

Mrs. Alison, who had dried her tears, was about to reply, when a servant entered the room with a letter in her hand.

"I'm very sorry, sir," she said, "but when I cleared the box this morning I must have left this letter in. I've only just discovered it by accident."

Captain Halford took the letter and looked at it.

"London postmark," he said; "don't know the hand. Some confounded circular, I suppose—Undertaker's lowest summer prices — or, embalming by easy instalments—weekly payments taken to meet the convenience of the executors."

He took a small paper-knife from the table, cut the envelope open, drew out the letter and unfolded it. He stared at the handwriting hard for a minute, then he allowed himself to read the contents. Before he had read many of the words he gave a sharp cry, and Mrs. Alison started up in alarm.

"Richard, what is it?"

Captain Halford, his face twitching nervously, made no reply, but read the letter to the end.

"SIR,—A bill for £200, accepted by your son, Mr. Cecil Halford, having been presented, and returned unpaid, I beg to give you notice of the fact, as the bill is indorsed by you, and I must request an immediate remittance of the amount. I am, sir, your obedient servant, SAMPSON GAYGOLD."

The letter dropped from Captain Halford's hands. At first he failed to realise all that it meant. He thought that his son had got into the hands of a money-lender, and was in difficulty. He had to read the letter again before the words "indorsed by you" came home to him in all their terrible significance.

"Oh, my boy—my boy, Cecil!" he groaned. Then he staggered to his feet with an effort, and began to pace the room.

His sister, alarmed, ran to his side. "Richard—what is it? Tell me the worst!"

"It's a swindle," cried the Captain—"an astounding swindle! A thief of a money-lender in London has got Cecil into his clutches, and he has the infamy to pretend that my boy has forged my name. It's a lie, Marion—a lie! I'll see this swindler and—I'll—I'll drag him before a magistrate and punish him. Ring the bell. Tell Jane to pack my things—I'm going to London by the next train."

At that moment May came in from the garden to say that Mr. Avory had gone. She stopped suddenly, terrified at her uncle's appearance.

"I can't go alone—I can't bear it!" exclaimed the Captain. "May, I'm going to London—at once, dear. You must come with me—I must have some one to talk to or I shall go mad!"

CHAPTER XVII

A TEA-PARTY

It was just on tea-time at the Veritys', and Mrs. Verity was bustling about in the pretty little sitting-room and making those homely preparations dear to the heart of the good housewife who is hospitably inclined, and who moves in a circle in which tea is still a substantial meal.

Susan Verity had been a cook in a good middle-class family when Tom Verity won her heart and hand. Susan was staying with her married sister, whose husband kept a little seaside inn in those days, and this inn was one much frequented by the ladies and gentlemen known as "buskers"—that is, itinerant performers, street musicians, and so forth. The trade was always brisk in the holiday season, for then the minstrels and the performers who earned a good living on the sands flocked to the place, and made the "Bell Inn" their headquarters.

Tom Verity was "busking" with a nigger troupe, of which he was practically the "boss." He had a capital voice, and he was a great favourite, especially with the ladies and the children. He lodged at the "Bell," and the landlady's sister was so surprised to find him a nice, quiet-spoken young man, and "quite a human being" when he had washed his face and put on the more sober raiment of everyday life, that she fell in love with him there and then.

As Tom, who was a great favourite with the landlord, generally had his supper with "the family" after his

hard day's work was over — he sang till ten o'clock outside the hotels and under the balconies of the lodging-houses on the front—Susan had many opportunities of conversing with the young man who had captured her affections.

Tom was not slow to appreciate the interest the landlady's sister took in him, and soon finding out that she was a good, hard-working girl with plenty of common sense, and an excellent cook, he began to think seriously of the little holiday flirtation. He asked Susan when she was going back, and was quite disappointed when he learnt that her short holiday would be over in a few days, and that then she was returning to service in Manchester Square. He made the very best use of the time that was at his disposal, and as he was always willing to oblige with a song after the house was closed, and was full of interesting anecdotes of his career and adventures as a minstrel, you may be sure that the little party did not break up in a hurry after supper.

At any rate, Tom had time enough to sing and talk himself into the heart of the young cook from London, and when the time came for Susan to leave, he lost his afternoon show and went with her to the station and took her ticket and saw her box into the luggage van, and before the train started he had obtained Susan's permission to be allowed to write to her.

After the seaside season was over, Tom, who was anxious to resume the personal acquaintance of Miss Susan, wrote and asked if he might have the honour of taking her for a walk when it was her Sunday out. The honour was graciously awarded. The first Sunday afternoon was spent at Hampton Court, and after Susan had enjoyed the beautiful gardens, and braved the perils of the maze, she and Tom sat on a seat, and were very happy until it was closing time.

Then they walked arm-in-arm to the station, and as it was growing dark, Tom took every advantage of the situation; and presently his arm stole round the young woman's waist, and he asked her in a husky voice if she thought she would ever care for him well enough to be engaged.

Susan blushed, and trembled, and hesitated, and that

was enough for Tom. He hadn't, of course, very much doubt about the matter, because when a young woman lets your arm go round her waist you may take it for granted that she doesn't dislike you.

From that day the courtship of Tom and Susan was unmarred by a single cloud. Even the weather was sympathetic, for Susan's Sundays out were so invariably fine that Tom never thought of taking his umbrella when he went to meet her. No matter how wet it might be during the week or on other Sundays, or even on that special Sunday morning, it always cleared up by half-past two, at which hour Susan was free for the rest of the day.

Tom, who was a prudent fellow even in those days, had never squandered the money he made by his profession. He had the good fortune to have a sweet tooth, and, like most men with a sweet tooth, he didn't care for drink. He wasn't a teetotaller, because he had no need to be. He took his glass of beer with his meals, and if it was a wet day and he felt cold, he could take his glass of whisky or brandy, or his glass of port; but he never drank for drinking's sake, and he didn't suffer from thirst. So it came about that he had saved enough money when he married to take three nice rooms and to furnish them comfortably. Susan was an excellent housekeeper, and the little home was her pride and her delight. And the teas and the suppers she gave Tom were his. He declared that he got hungry long before it was time to come home, simply from thinking about the nice dish he was sure his little wife would have ready for him.

After he was married, Tom improved his position. He didn't go out in the streets and he didn't sing of an evening. He got known at the race meetings and the regattas by the better class of frequenters, and as everybody liked him because he was never vulgar and objectionable, and because he always did his work like an artist and like a gentleman, at Ascot and Goodwood he was asked to sing at house parties, and this was the beginning of his best time. The rich pleasure-seekers paid him handsomely for his services on such special occasions, and when he sang among the coaches in the enclosures,

shillings and half-crowns were showered upon him. Tom Verity had tasted the sweetness of being a public favourite.

Then he took a little house and put money in the bank—money which was one day to be his Jenny's—for a sweet little girl had come to crown the wedded happiness of honest Tom Verity and his wife.

Jenny was their idol. Her mother adored her—her father worshipped her. When she grew old enough, she went to the best day-school in the neighbourhood, and mixed with girls whose parents would probably have looked down upon Tom and his banjo. From the first the child was musical, and Tom made up his mind that she should have all the musical education that he could afford. He paid for lessons for her after school-time, and when she grew up and was old enough he sent her to the Academy.

Tom's ambition for Jenny was boundless. He didn't think that her voice would ever be quite up to grand opera form, and he didn't want her to go on the stage at all. But he thought that one day she would be a star of the concert platform, and—there was no hurry for that, however. He wanted Jenny to have the advantage of a thorough training as long as she could, and to take care of herself and enjoy herself in her leisure.

And he did everything to make her happy. At home Jenny was a little princess. Her mother waited on her hand and foot, and her father was always bringing home pretty knick-knacks for the little room which was Jenny's own. His one fear was that his daughter might suffer or be looked down upon because her father was an outdoor "minstrel."

Jenny repaid the love and devotion of her parents in every way that she could. She understood that it was not wise to let the Academy girls know what her father was; but she was never ashamed of it herself. She knew how her father had earned the money that he spent upon her, and she was as proud of him as if he had been a Sims Reeves or a Sarasate. He might play on racecourses, but he was a musician; and it isn't where you sing or where you play that makes a man that; it is

how you sing and how you play. Some of our greatest musicians, some of our greatest operatic artists, have begun by earning their living under the open sky. The only difference between them and Tom Verity was, that he remained under the open sky a good many years longer than they did.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Verity was getting anxious. Tom had promised to be home at seven, for his brother William was coming to tea. It was five minutes past. The potato-cake—one of Mrs. Verity's specialities—was done to perfection; the little three-cornered dripping cakes that the sergeant loved were baked to a turn. The kettle was singing on the trivet; Prince, the big black cat, had left the hearth-rug, and had jumped on a chair in anticipation of the saucer of milk which he always had at tea-time, and still there was no Tom.

Jenny was sitting in her own little room playing the piano softly. When she heard her father's knock she would go and open the door. It was the privilege of the minstrel on his return to be received on the threshold with a kiss from Jenny. He always declared that his lips used to shape themselves for that kiss as he turned the corner of the street.

Mrs. Verity listened for his knock and grew anxious. Then she listened to the music in her daughter's room. Jenny was playing a Reverie—playing it with her heart as well as with her fingers, and Susan Verity shook her head.

"Oh, dear," she said, "I don't know what's come to our Jenny. She never plays anything lively now, and these foreign things are all very well, but they make me want to cry—I wish she'd bang the piano and give us something English and wholesome."

There was a knock at the street door. Mrs. Verity heard the piano close and the rustle of Jenny's dress as she went to welcome her father.

Then Tom and the sergeant came in together, Jenny following them. "Well, my dear, here we are," exclaimed Tom. "I met William at the top of the street. I hope we aren't late."

"Not very," said Mrs. Verity; "but I'm glad you've come. I was getting anxious about the cakes."

"So was I," said the sergeant. "I've been thinking about them all day. Why, Jenny, my dear," he added, turning to his niece, "how pale you look. Aren't you well?"

Jenny flushed and said she was all right, but Tom shook his head. "She hasn't been at all well lately, William," he said. "But I think she's better now—aren't you, dear?"

"Yes, father, I'm much better."

Mrs. Verity as she poured out the tea gave the sergeant a look, and he understood. Tom was worried about Jenny.

"Well, William, and what are you doing now? Got any interesting cases?" said Mrs. Verity, to turn the conversation.

"No," replied the sergeant. "Nothing out of the ordinary, but I'm a bit worried."

"On the track and can't get there?" said Tom, smiling, for he knew the sore point at the Yard.

"No—I'm worried about a man I'm interested in—a ticket-of-leave chap. You've heard me talk of Stephen Alison?"

"Yes," said Tom; "him that was in the Turf Fraud case."

"Yes. Well, he's out, and I thought he would go straight. Jack Gannett and I had a dispute about it. You know Jack never believes in anybody."

"So you always say, William."

"Well, I stuck up for Alison, and Jack went dead against him, and—I'm afraid Gannett's going to be right."

"What's your ticket-of-leave friend doing, then?"

"Well, Gannett's got certain information that makes me uncomfortable. He believes there's some big swindle afloat, and that Alison's in it. I mustn't mention names, but he's in again with a man that we've got our own ideas about at the Yard, and he's going in a false name."

"Ah!" said Tom. "But after all, if you've made your own name a bad one to go about with, I suppose it's only prudent to change it."

The sergeant shook his head.

"He went to a house where his real name was known to the master, and he gave the name of Stephens to the servant. Gannett got this out of the man, and that and one or two other things make it look bad. Gannett declares that he'll be in our hands again before long, and that upsets me, because I hate Gannett to be always proving me wrong—especially in this case."

"What's your special interest in this case, William?"

"Well, I'm sorry for Alison. He's a gentleman, and he had a lot of misfortune before he went wrong, and he's got a wife and a daughter—a beautiful girl about our Jenny's age."

"Ah, that must be terrible," said Mrs. Verity, "to be the wife of a convict! And the poor lady and her daughter—are they with him?"

"No; they live with a relative—a Captain Halford."

"Halford!" exclaimed Tom; "Captain Halford. Does he live at Patterdale?"

"Yes—do you know him?"

"I met him—you remember, Jenny, I showed you the house. That was Captain Halford's niece—that pretty girl. Why, what's the matter with you, Jenny?"

Jenny, whose face was white, rose from the table. "It's nothing, father," she said; "only a bad headache. I'll go to my room and lie down for a while."

Mrs. Verity rose and went with her daughter. Tom Verity, with an anxious look on his face, turned to his brother.

"I'm afraid my poor girl's worse than we think, William," he said. "She hasn't been herself for months past. I shall take her to a physician. I'm terribly anxious about her."

The sergeant said nothing.

He was a trained observer of small things, and he had noticed that the sudden change came over his niece when the name of Halford was mentioned.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HUNDRED ON ACCOUNT

SEATED in an easy-chair by the fire in the library at Grosvenor Place, Stephen Alison for a moment forgot the part that he was playing.

At Darvell's he was only the guest of a man who, though he had secured a position of apparent respectability, was still an adventurer of the worst type and the confidant of criminals.

At Darvell's Alison had only been reminded of the old days when he was becoming desperate, and had unwillingly associated himself with the kites and vultures of the Turf—men who, though they dressed like gentlemen and spoke the Queen's English correctly, were, so far as wickedness was concerned, no better than the tricksters and thieves who hang about the streets and taverns to prey upon the young men from the country and the foolish, middle-aged provincials who seem to have been specially designed by nature as subjects for the confidence trick.

Jack Darvell's little dinner-party only reminded him of many a night at the big hotels in the provinces, when, after a day's racing, Darvell and one or two of the same kidney would get young men with more money than brains to their rooms and make a night of it at the card-table.

There are stories told on the Turf to this day of the doings of the "swell mob" of adventurers, who rooked one young nobleman of £10,000 at an hotel in Liverpool, and another of £15,000 a week or two later in Manchester, and of this set Darvell had been a member when Alison unfortunately made his acquaintance, and was by him led on to participate in the fraud for which he had suffered so severely.

To dine with Darvell again amid luxurious surroundings, with young men of birth and position, only revived in him memories of his past degradation. When he

found himself sitting with Lord Charlton in the home of his father the Earl of Powick, and when he realised that he was being treated as a guest by a man who, whatever his extravagances and weaknesses might be, was still an honest man and a gentleman, the novelty of the situation quite carried Stephen Alison out of himself, and caused him to forget for a moment that he was only acting a part.

But when after the first feeling of relief at finding himself once more received in an English home had worn off, and Alison realised the falseness of his position, the hot blood rushed to his face.

He was a convict—a ticket-of-leave man—a man bound to report himself every month to the police. He had only a few shillings in his possession, and here he was sitting comfortably in the library of a house in Grosvenor Place, smoking and drinking with the heir to the Earldom of Powick, and the Earl and Countess were in their apartments above.

He wondered what the old Earl would say if he knew the sort of a man his son was entertaining under his roof. He wondered what the Countess would feel if she knew that a convict—a gaol-bird—was on the premises at this time of the night.

Alison threw himself back in the easy-chair and watched the smoke from the excellent cigar Charlton had given him curl up to the artistically decorated ceiling.

Here he was for all practical purposes a man hired to commit murder, and he was alone within four walls enjoying the hospitality of his intended victim.

The man who had introduced him to Lord Charlton had not the slightest doubt but that he had accepted the "job" offered to him, and that he would carry out his instructions to the best of his ability.

When Darvell saw Gaygold, the money-lender and his associate in the villainous scheme, he would tell him plainly that Steve Alison, the ex-convict, had taken on the Charlton job, and Gaygold would think of him only as an unscrupulous scoundrel, hired to encompass the death of a dissipated young man. There was to be no bloodshed, of course. It was to be "accident"—

the sort of accident quite likely to happen to a man in the Rockies who was at once a reckless sportsman and a heavy drinker; but it was murder that Darvell and Gaygold had planned, and the murderer selected for the task was himself, Stephen Alison.

And the plot had so far succeeded that the young man was not only treating him as a good fellow whose acquaintance he was happy to have made, but was going to hand over to him a hundred pounds to pay the preliminary expenses of his own prearranged assassination.

Stephen had accepted the cigar with the gratitude of a man who for several years had been ruthlessly cut off from the solace of tobacco, but he had at first refused the liqueur glass of brandy which Charlton offered him, saying that he preferred a long drink and would take seltzer with it. But as the situation revealed itself to him in all its nakedness, he felt in need of the stimulant.

"I think I'll have that brandy by itself," he said; "it's too good for seltzer."

"You're right there, old chap," replied his lordship; "it's splendid stuff. My father's had it for goodness knows how long, but there wouldn't be such a large stock of it in the cellar if I were to stay here long."

He poured out a big liqueur glass of brandy and handed it to Stephen, who lifted it to his lips and drank it down quickly.

Lord Charlton watched him and smiled. "That's right, my boy," he said. "I was afraid you were one of the new-fangled chaps who can't take their liquor like men, and that wouldn't have suited me."

Stephen put the glass down and shook his head. "No, I suppose not," he said, "but you needn't be afraid of that. I don't think you'll find me a wet blanket when we get away together."

The young nobleman poured out another glass of brandy for himself, and then another, and as he had drunk freely at Darvell's and hadn't a particularly strong head, the spirit began to take effect upon him, and he relieved himself of some of his secrets to the man whose acquaintance he had made only a few hours previously.

But Alison was in no mood to receive his host's confidences on matters in which he had not the slightest interest. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He wanted to get away by himself and think seriously how far he was justified in carrying on the scheme in which he had embarked—how far he was by his silence making himself party to the monstrous crime that Darvell had conceived. Of course, he wouldn't carry it out. He was going to protect the young man: to be his friend and not his enemy; but ought he not to have broken off all relations with Darvell directly the plot was revealed?

If he had done so, of course he would have left the field open for another, and perhaps a less scrupulous agent, to be engaged. Then he would have had to go to the police and tell them everything. And if he had, what would they have thought of him?—that it was a quarrel between two criminal associates, and that he was, in the language of the fraternity, "rounding on a pal."

Thinking in the heated atmosphere, and with the brandy, to which he had been unaccustomed of late, mounting to his head, he became nervous and confused. He determined to go.

He rose and looked at the clock. "It's getting late," he said; "I think I'd better be off now. We can meet again to-morrow and talk our arrangements over."

"All right, old chap, but you're not keeping me up, you know. It's deuced early for me—I hate going to bed."

"I'd rather get home, if you don't mind."

"Very well. But I shan't be able to see you to-morrow. I'm going to put in a day's racing—it's about the last I shall have for some time."

"Then to-morrow night?"

"Mightn't be home. I'll see you the day after to-morrow. Come here about twelve o'clock. Will that do?"

"Yes—I'll make it do."

"But I say, old chap, you must get your things together. There won't be too much time. I want to start next

week. Wait a minute—I'll give you the money—Sure a hundred will do?"

"Oh yes—quite sure," said Alison.

He wanted even then to refuse the money, but he hesitated to do so. He must either go through with the thing or give it up at once, and he couldn't make up his mind then.

If he was going through with it he must have the money and get the clothes and things he wanted to start with.

Lord Charlton went out of the library and upstairs to his own room. He returned in a minute or two with a couple of bank-notes for fifty pounds each.

"There you are, old chap," he said, "and we can fix up everything else when we meet."

Stephen Alison took the two fifties and folded them to put in his pocket. As he did so he noticed that they were indorsed "Charlton."

"Looking at my signature on the back, eh, old chap?" said his lordship. "Fine fist I've got, haven't I? I put my name on them because I sent my man out this evening to get some small notes, thinking we might be going to play at Darvell's, but the fool brought them back and said he couldn't get them changed. I suppose he was lazy and didn't try."

Stephen Alison put the notes into his pocket. He was wondering where he should change them. He could hardly ask Lobelia to run across to the public-house with a fifty-pound note for him, and as he didn't patronise any tradespeople he couldn't go himself to a shop. He supposed he should have to take them to the Bank of England and cash them there.

He put on his overcoat and Lord Charlton went to the door with him, bade him good night, and let him out.

Lord Charlton stood for a minute or two in the open doorway looking out into the night. At that moment a figure moved from the shadow and went quickly in the direction of the Park.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

Joe Huggett found the Duke waiting for him at the place he had said he would be.

"Well," asked the Duke eagerly, as Huggett came up to him, "is the coast clear?"

"Yes, that cove's just gone. It was the young toff hisself as let him out."

"Then we'll give him half-an-hour, Joe, to get to bed. Directly he's out o' the way we can have the library to ourselves. There ain't nobody ever sits up except when the old gal or the old gent's out, and they ain't to-night—my pal got that out o' the maid."

"Ah, Dook," exclaimed Joe, "what a blessin' it is for us as wimmin has lovin' and faithful 'earts. If that gal hadn't stuck to her young man after he got the sack and took to gamblin' and evil courses, as the missioner chap calls it, we'd never have had this little job cut and dried for us. Love's a wonderful useful thing in our purfession, ain't it, Dook? Bless the wimmin, I ses."

"Don't you worry your head about the wimmin, Joe," growled the Duke. "Let's look after our job. We'll stroll past the 'ouse on the oppersit side permiskus. You go on a bit ahead o' me in case o' accidents. That there young bobby got on my nerves the way he was a-flashin' his bull's-eye down the areas. He won't be so fond o' playin' with it when he gits a bit more used to night work. Look out!"

The two men separated, and Joe Huggett, thrusting his hands in his pockets, slouched on ahead.

A man was passing slowly by on the other side. But as he sauntered along he was looking in the doorways and glancing over the area railings in a manner which had betrayed him to the practised eye of the Duke. The man's attention being fixed on the houses, he did not look across to the dead wall on the opposite side,

and so Joe and the Duke were spared any polite attentions on his part.

"You twigged him smart, Dook," said Joe, as the Duke came up with him again. "I hadn't spotted him."

"No, I see you hadn't—or you wouldn't ha' took your interlectchal countenance bang into the lamplight. He'll be all right now for a good half-hour. He's got a long round."

"It ain't fair, Dook," exclaimed Joe, with a touch of righteous indignation in his tone. "We has quite enough odds agen us getting our living with the regular coves, without their putting this 'ere extry lot on to spile our season."

The man who had passed had been recognised by both the housebreakers as one of the extra plain clothes policemen who, during the winter months, are put on specially to look out for suspicious characters loitering about for the purpose of committing burglaries. They are known officially as "The Winter Patrol," and the gentlemen of Mr. Huggett's profession look upon them with a feeling of hatred which is only exceeded by their contempt and loathing for the uniformed officer in silent boots.

You can argue with a professional thief or housebreaker until you are black in the face, but you will never convince him that those silent boots are not an outrage on the British Constitution, and utterly opposed to that spirit of fair play which is popularly supposed to be the sole possession of the English people. "It ain't playing the game fair and honest," is the unanimous verdict passed by the criminal classes on those silent boots.

The Duke was inclined to be ill-tempered over the winter patrol man. That was just the sort of thing he didn't want. His plan had been well thought out, and everything arranged for effecting an entrance into the basement through the area.

The areas of the houses in Grosvenor Place do not offer any special difficulty to a man with ordinary agility, who wants to explore them after the area gate is closed. You have only to get on to the front doorstep and climb over the stonework at the side, and there are nice little architectural resting-places for your feet and hands, and the

descent, if you are prepared to drop a foot or two at the finish, is simplicity itself.

It was in this way that the burglars intended—all being well—to effect an entrance into the residence of the Earl of Powick.

They knew exactly where to break in without exposing themselves needlessly to the attention of a passer-by, and once inside they would, thanks to "information received," have no difficulty in making their way quietly to the dining-room floor and taking temporary possession of the library, in which was the big safe which it was their desire to unlock and relieve of its valuable contents.

The two men, trained to the necessities of the situation, separated and walked along Grosvenor Place in a manner that would not have aroused suspicion in the mind of the most active and intelligent officer in the police service. They stepped out briskly, one keeping well ahead of the other.

The thoroughfare was quiet. The police constable on duty was, they saw to their intense relief, passing along well ahead of them. That would give them a chance of reconnoitring the house as they wanted to without attracting attention.

As they came near the residence of Lord Powick, the leader, Joe Huggett, stopped dead, and his "pal" came up to him quickly.

"What's up Joe?"

Joe jerked his thumb in the direction of the house. A faint stream of light was coming from the interior and falling on the pavement in front. The two men drew nearer.

"It's the young toff himself," exclaimed the Duke, grasping Joe's arm. "By gum—what a chance. He's got the door wide open."

"Well, that's no good to us," growled Joe.

"No good, you fool!" whispered the Duke. "It's the best as could have happened. There ain't a soul in the street. Follow me—quick!"

The Duke and his companion crossed the road, and walked rapidly in the direction of the house with the open door, keeping near the railings. As they came to

the Earl's house the Duke clutched the life-preserver in his pocket.

Then, before the young lord, who was still standing in the doorway and enjoying the cold night air, could move or utter a cry, the Duke leapt up the steps, and seizing him by the throat with a grip like a vice, to prevent him uttering a cry, thrust him back into the hall.

In a second Joe Huggett, taking in the situation at a glance, followed, and pushed the front door to behind him. Then, jumping on a chair, he turned on the hall light.

As he did so, the Duke, still gripping the almost senseless man by the throat, pushed him into the library, the door of which was open. At the same time he drew the bludgeon from his pocket, and brought it down with a crash upon Lord Charlton's skull. As the ruffian relaxed his hold, the young man fell forward on the floor.

"He won't come to in a hurry," exclaimed the Duke. "Now, then, let's get at the swag. If we don't have any bother with the key, we've had the neatest job as good luck ever put in a hardworking cracksman's way."

The burglars listened for a moment.

All was silent as the grave.

Leaving the young lord where he had fallen, the Duke put his hand into an inner pocket of his thick waistcoat and drew out a bright new key. Joe Huggett went to the library door and closed it softly. Then they opened the painted wooden door, behind which the safe-door was hidden.

The key fitted the safe perfectly. The Duke turned it quietly and the big lock shot back. In a moment the confederates had pushed the heavy door back on its hinges, and the interior of the safe and its contents lay revealed to them.

"It's big enough for a man to stand upright in, Dook,' said Joe.

"Yes—it's a good old one by the look of it—sort of thing I've come on before now in these swagger 'ouses. Go on in, Joe, and hand the things out. I can't see the tin box with the jewellery. It's on one of the shelves

most likely, hidden away behind some of the old papers and things."

Joe Huggett, rummaging on a shelf, found that the Duke's suggestion was that of an expert. The jewels were in a tin box—a dirty old battered tin box that, not being found in a safe, you wouldn't attach much value to. It was a whim of her ladyship's to have the box hidden under a lot of old papers—old deeds and parchments which were piled around it. The Countess had an idea that, in the event of the safe ever being tampered with, the thief would think it contained nothing but papers and retire disgusted.

But the Duke was not to be caught that way. Directly Huggett handed him out the box he prised it open, and his wicked eyes gleamed as he found that it contained the most valuable of the famous family jewels.

He opened the cases and feasted his eyes on the diamonds, the rubies, the pearls, and all the sparkling gems. Then filling his own pockets and bidding Huggett do the same, he thrust the empty cases back into the tin box and put it back upon the shelf again, rearranging the papers in front of it.

Such care on the part of a burglar was remarkable. But the Duke was always careful. He argued that, the longer the time that elapsed before a loss was discovered, the longer the time allowed to the thief to dispose of the plunder without a lot of beastly handbills and police notices to "crab the deal."

The jewels secured and the box returned to its place, the Duke looked round the room.

"There's nothing here but what's too heavy for us to-night, Joe," he said. "We've got a first-class haul this time, and we mustn't run no risk."

His eyes lighted on the spirit stand, the bottle of brandy and the glasses.

"Ah," he said, "here's something as we might carry without much trouble." He poured some neat brandy into a tumbler, drank it off, and smacked his lips. "By gum, that's fine stuff! Lor, if I'd enough of that inside me I'd back myself to crack Buckinam Palace and git clear away with the Crown o' England and the Koeynoor. Have a swig at it, Joe?"

Joe came out of the safe and helped himself liberally. "Here's to'ards you, Dook," he said, as he tossed the strong liquor down his throat as though it were milk and water, "and to our next little job—may they all be as soft as this 'un."

Joe looked round and saw a box of cigars lying on the edge of a bookcase. "All the comforts of a 'ome here for us, Dook," he said, and taking the cigars out he tumbled them into his pocket.

"I can do with a smoke after this job, Joe," said the Duke, "and there's nothing like a prime Havanner to soothe yer nervis system after you've been a earning a honest livin' with the sweat o' your brow. Now then, don't let's make fools of ourselves 'cus there's a bottle o' brandy about—let's see if the coast's clear and get."

"Wait a minute, Dook—what about 'im?" muttered Joe, pointing to the prostrate form of Lord Charlton. "He's lying jolly quiet."

"He's had a good sleeping draff," growled the Duke. "If he'd ha' kept hurly hours he'd ha' been lying much more comfortable in his bed than he is on the 'earthrug."

The ruffian knelt down beside the body of his victim, and, in the language of his fraternity, "went over him." He thrust his hands into his lordship's pockets and emptied them of gold and silver. Then he took off the watch and chain, and feeling in the breast-pocket of the young man's dress-coat pulled out some bank-notes.

"Flimsies, Joe!" he exclaimed. Then he lifted one of the limp hands. On one of the fingers there was a diamond ring.

"No good leavin' that," said the Duke, and he began to pull it off.

But something in the feel of the senseless man's hand caused him to drop it and to look earnestly in the white face. Then he rose from his knees, pale and disconcerted.

"Let's get out of this quick, Joe," he whispered. "I'm hanged if I haven't done for him. It's outing dues this time if we're copped."

"Dead!" exclaimed Joe.

"Yes—if he ain't now he will be soon. I don't like the look of 'im. Come out of it quick."

Joe Huggett listened a moment, and the Duke, who was at the door, stopped at a signal from him.

"We'd better shut the safe and lock it again, Dook," he said. "It'll give us longer afore there's a hullabaloo to-morrow."

"What's the good of that? Come away. *That*'ll give us away directly a servant comes into the room in the mornin'." He pointed to the body of Lord Charlton.

"Then don't let it give us away too hurly," said Joe.

He looked towards the big safe, the door of which was standing wide open, and the Duke followed his eyes and understood.

"The two burglars bent down over the body and, lifting it between them, carried it to the strong room—it was more that than an ordinary safe—and placed it gently inside in a sitting posture.

The Duke was about to close the door on the ghastly face of his victim, when Joe whispered him again. "Wait," he said, and pointed to the young lord's coat and hat, which he had laid on a chair when he had come in with Stephen Alison.

The Duke took them and placed them in the safe. Then he closed the iron door, locked it, put the key in his pocket, and pushed the outer door to.

The two men looked carefully round the library. Everything was in order. There was nothing to hint that a man had been done to death there barely a quarter of an hour ago.

Then, pale and nervous now that murder had been in their night's work, they crept to the front door and opened it, and one of them peered cautiously out.

The street was silent. Not the sound of a footstep was to be heard.

They stepped out, pulled the door to softly, and heard the latch slip into its place.

Then they walked quickly away.

CHAPTER XX

A PRIVATE INQUIRY

Mr. Clement Hansell had a bad night. It wasn't that he suffered from insomnia, but he didn't try to go to sleep.

After he went to bed he began to think, and one thought suggested another, and in consequence it was well on into the small hours before he finally dismissed all ideas of the past and of the future from his mind, and settling himself into a comfortable position, fell asleep.

The principal subject of the millionaire's musings had been "coincidence." He knew the stock phrase of the writers who sit in their easy-chairs and write loftily of the long arm of coincidence in fiction and on the stage. But he had never been one to admit the justice of the sneer at it. The man who gets away from humdrum, everyday existence never does sneer at the long arm, for the long arm is continually stretching itself out to make the comedies and tragedies of life. But though Clement Hansell had over and over again had personal knowledge of the length to which that wonderful arm can extend itself, he was inclined to put down his own experience as beating the record.

Of all the hotels in London, he had selected one in which the waiter who was to attend to his wants in his private sitting-room was a native of the Rhineland town in which Max Freiligrath, the man whom he had betrayed, and Catherine Weber, the woman who had sworn to be revenged on him, had lived.

He had not asked the waiter any further questions. He was content to leave the matter where it was. He made up his mind that it *was* coincidence, and that Otto Muller, the German waiter, even if he had known Max Freiligrath or Catherine Weber, would not be in possession of their history after they left Rudesheim.

Of course if he were—if Catherine Weber had written

the story of her dead sweetheart to her relatives, and her relatives had talked, it was just possible that in a small place like Rudesheim this German waiter might have heard of it.

And if he had, what then? Supposing even that he knew where his fellow-townswoman was, and he could go to her and say, "Clement Hansell, the man you say was the cause of your lover's imprisonment and death, is staying at our hotel." What then?

What could the woman do? Call upon him—demand to see him—threaten him?

If she were going to do that, she need not come to the hotel. He had flung down the gauntlet to Fate when he had returned to England, and already it was known that he had taken a house in London.

That was in the papers for any one to read. Presently, when he began to lead his new life, there would be more about him in the papers. In time, thousands would hear of him, and Catherine Weber, if she were alive and in London, would be among the number.

He had calculated beforehand all that her threat might mean to him. At the worst he would be the victim of an annoyance to which most rich men are subjected—threats or blackmail. If he found the woman, he would behave well to her for the sake of his old comrade. If she refused his generosity and made a disturbance or libelled him, the law would assist him. The charge was an absurd one to raise again after all these years. There was the trial at the Cape to prove conclusively that Max was guilty, and there was nothing to connect Clement Hansell with his arrest. Mr. Hansell was now a millionaire, and above the wild charges of a poor German governess, whose reason had been affected by the loss of her lover. Of course, her reason *was* affected: that was proved by the absurd charge she brought against a millionaire, and by the equally absurd threat to kill the man whom she wrongfully accused.

Clement Hansell had thought all these things over before he sailed for England. But thinking them over again in a London hotel, he could not help feeling that the presence every day in his sitting-room of a German who came from the same town as Catherine Weber and

Max Freiligrath was a coincidence which he could have done without. It might hasten matters. He didn't think it would—but it *might*. When once the missing link is found, you never know how soon the two ends of the chain are going to be joined together.

Mr. Clement Hansell slept late. He was roused by a knock at his bedroom door. As soon as he answered, Otto the waiter explained to him that a messenger had come from a Mr. Jones to see him, and had brought a letter.

"All right," said Mr. Hansell, "tell him to leave it. And you can get my breakfast—I shall be ready in half-an-hour."

After ordering his breakfast, he had his bath, and half-an-hour later went into his sitting-room.

The letter was lying on the table. It was a bulky one, and there was something hard inside the envelope.

Mr. Hansell opened it and found a key and a note of apology from the agent, who explained that he had to leave town that morning to inspect a property in the country, but he forwarded the key of the house in Grosvenor Place by a clerk, and that he himself would be at Mr. Hansell's service on his return, which would be in a couple of days.

Mr. Hansell, who had dressed himself for walking, slipped the latch-key of Grosvenor Place on to the ring at the end of a chain which held the keys of his boxes and portmanteaus, and put the house agent's letter into his pocket and went out.

His first visit was to a house in a little street running out of Villier Street, Strand. Here he paused in front of an old-fashioned house, and looked carefully at the list of names painted up on the sides of the entrance hall.

He found the name he wanted, went upstairs to the third floor, and knocked at a door on which was inscribed "Mr. Weston, Private Inquiry Agent."

A clerk opened the door and, in answer to his questain, showed him into Mr. Weston's private office. Mr. Weston, a short, wizened little man of about sixty, rose to greet him.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir?" he said.

"I am a South African," replied Mr. Hansell, "and I have been recommended to you by a friend out there. I want you to make an inquiry for me."

"Certainly. Give me the particulars."

Clement Hansell gave the inquiry agent the date of Stephen Alison's conviction and the particulars of his sentence.

"It is a simple matter," he said. "All I want to know is if this man is still in gaol or, if he is liberated on licence, where he can be found. It ought not to take you long to ascertain. I presume you are in a position to go to the police?"

"A convict whose sentence has not expired is never very difficult to trace," replied Mr. Weston.

"Can you have the information by to-morrow?"

"Yes, I should think so, certainly."

"Then I'll call at this time to-morrow for it, and pay you your fee."

"Very good," said Mr. Weston; "but in case I should want to communicate with you, your name and address would be useful."

"You won't have anything to communicate before to-morrow, and then I shall come myself. Good morning."

When Clement Hansell got outside he wondered what he should do. He thought he would go to Grosvenor Place now that he had the key, but after thinking the matter over for a moment, he decided not to.

"I'll stay at the hotel to-night," he thought to himself, "and call here for the information about Stephen to-morrow. "I'll send a message from the hotel to-day to Grosvenor Place to say I'm coming in sometime to-morrow, then they'll be prepared for me."

He walked from the Strand to Westminster and took a river steamer back as far as London Bridge. From London Bridge he went into the City, and roamed about the old familiar streets. There he passed men who had known him in the old days. He knew them, but though they looked at him there was no sign of recognition in their faces.

"Taking the moustache off has made a wonderful difference," he said; "I don't think even my old Cape friends would know me without it."

He dined at the hotel, but he was silent and thoughtful, and said nothing to the waiter. In the evening he went to a theatre, and retired to rest early.

The next day he called at the inquiry agent's. Mr. Weston had obtained the information, and handed it to him, neatly written out on a sheet of paper.

Stephen Alison had been released on licence, and was at present occupying a room at No. — Exton Street, Euston Road.

Clement Hansell paid the fee, took the paper, and his departure. When he got into the Strand he unfolded the paper the agent had given him, and read it carefully.

"I'll take the bull by the horns and go and see Stephen to-day," he said. "It's much better to settle with him first than risk a chance meeting with him some day when there might not be time for an explanation before he gave me away."

Then he drew out his pocket-book to put the paper in it. "I've found Stephen," he said; "now I must trace Catherine Weber."

Instinctively he felt in his pocket-book for the letter. It was gone.

The discovery of his loss staggered him. He broke out into a cold perspiration. Great Heaven, if that letter was in any one's hands!

Then he recovered himself. After all, what was it? If any one had found it and tried to make use of it, he had only to say it was a blackmailer's idle threat, and there would be an end of the matter.

His first business was to find Stephen and settle with him. He didn't much like the idea of going to Exton Street in the daylight. He would go back to the hotel, stay there till evening, then settle up and have his things sent on to Grosvenor Place.

And then he would go straight to Exton Street and get the much-dreaded interview with his brother over.

CHAPTER XXI

STEPHEN ALISON HAS A VISITOR

Lobelia Cutts was weary of life. She had a silent sorrow that took away her appetite even for the highly-seasoned penny fiction she had been in the habit of devouring at every convenient opportunity. What to her now were the woes of Letitia, the gamekeeper's daughter, consumed by a burning love for the young heir to the dukedom, who was willing to sacrifice title, fortune, fame, all that he possessed and did not possess, to make her his bride? What to her was it that the loving heir was confined in a private lunatic asylum by the order of his guardian, a wicked old lord who wanted his own daughter—the black-eyed vixen, Lady Arabella—to become the duchess?

Once the story had thrilled Lobelia, and her heart had gone out to the faithful lovers, one illegally confined in a madhouse, and the other nursing her father through a bad attack of delirium tremens, in which he raved of a child stolen from its dying mother's arms—a child who was the heiress to one of the proudest names in the land.

She knew that in the end things would end happily for the gamekeeper's daughter, but how could things ever end happily for her—for Lobelia, the orphan of Exton Street, who had never told her love, but let concealment, like the worm, prey on her damask cheek?

There was cause for Lobelia's present depression. A bombshell had burst in the domestic interior of the Chipchases.

It was at breakfast time the morning after Jim had found the mysterious letter in his cab that the catastrophe occurred. Jim had been more than usually particular in his toilet: he had his highest and stiffest collar on, his hat shone like the summer sun upon a tideless sea, his white cravat was folded to Bond Street perfection and fastened with the gold pin that had been presented to

him by a young sporting gentleman whom he had driven to all the suburban race meetings, and also to the Bankruptcy Court.

Jim had dressed himself for the day before going out to be shaved. It was while he was out for this purpose that he also had his hat ironed, and bought a "buttonhole" for his fawn-coloured box-cloth coat.

When he came in fresh and ruddy, and arrayed in his best, Lobelia, who was helping her aunt with the breakfast, nearly dropped the dish with the haddock on it in the enthusiasm of her admiration. She felt that Jim was much too good for his surroundings. He made the little room and the mean furniture look poverty-stricken, and Lobelia instinctively wiped her hands on her apron before she touched the back of his chair to put it up to the table for him.

Sam Chipchase surveyed his son with a mixture of wonder and pity. "You didn't ought to be driving a cab, Jim, in them things," he grunted; "you ought to be a-ridin' inside with the glass down."

"Good for you, father," said Jim, laughing, and laying his newly polished hat carefully on the little table with a crochet cover that stood in the window and was devoted as a rule solely to the accommodation of a large shell, to which, if you put your ear, you were supposed to hear the roaring of the ocean.

Then he took off his overcoat, folded it and laid it on the sofa, and flicking the chair with his handkerchief sat down.

Mrs. Chipchase came in hot and bustling from the kitchen, and seizing the teapot, began to pour out for the family. When everybody's cup was full, Mrs. Chipchase turned her attention to the haddock and served that vigorously, and then for the first time her eyes fell on Jim.

"What's on extra to-day, Jim?" she asked, looking her son up and down, not without a feeling of motherly pride.

"Nothing particular, mother—I'm only going to pay a hurly call, that's all."

"You might be going to Mulberry 'Ouse, Jim, by the look of you," said Sam, groaning rheumatically as he

reached across for the slice of thick bread and butter which his better half had just cut for him.

"No, father, me and his Rile 'Ighness 'aven't got beyond passing the time of day permiscus when we meet yet. I'm a-goin' to Grosvenor Place."

"Oh," said Sam, "then you're going to ask for Mr. ——"

Jim Chipchase winked at his father, and the old gentleman checked the name that was upon his lips by taking a big bite into his bread and butter.

"What's all this mysteriousness between you and your father?" exclaimed Mrs. Chipchase, who had seen and correctly interpreted her son's facial telegraphy. "I hope you're not a-breaking out again, Jim, and persuading your father to risk his 'ard-earned money in any of your precious racin' tips as you call 'em. It ain't respectable at his time o' life, and I don't hold with it in anybody."

"No, mother, it ain't a 'oss this time; it's a little bit of privit spekylation o' my own as I've took father's advice about, that's all."

"*You'll* never make no money, Jim," said Mrs. Chipchase scornfully; "you thinks too much of 'ow you looks in the shop windows—you're too fond o' titivating yourself up ever to make money tradin'."

"Have it that way, mother," answered Jim, handing up his cup for some more tea, "but I think there's a little bit of rhino for me where I'm going to-day. It's just possible as my noo friend as I'm going to see may take a pertikler fancy to me and be the makin' of me. Might find me the ready to start me on my own, you know—just out o' gratitude for what I'm goin' to do for him. If he does, mother, I shall introdooce a young lady to you next Sunday as is very likely to take me off your hands.

"You don't mean as you're courtin', Jim, and never said a word about it to me!" exclaimed his mother.

"Well, I thought I'd ask the young lady if she'd 'ave me first, mother, and tell you after."

"Well, Jim, I hope if ever you do think of getting married you won't choose one o' them gals as is all ostridge feathers in their hats and no soles to their boots and——Why, what's the matter with *you*, Lobelia?"

Lobelia had been eating her haddock and gazing at

Jim during the first portion of the conversation. But when Jim announced that he had begun to look about him for the future Mrs. Chipchase, Junior, she forgot that a piece of the thin portion of the haddock was in her mouth from which she had not yet extracted the bones, and in her jealous rage at the idea of Jim introducing a young woman to the family tea-table, she swallowed her haddock, bones and all, and choked and spluttered and went so red in the face, that Jim got up and slapped her on the back, and that delicate attention being quite too much for her wounded susceptibilities under the circumstances, she jumped up and ran into the back kitchen.

Eventually she succeeded in dislodging the bone that stuck in her throat. But the fish-bone of jealousy was too firmly implanted in her heart to be dislodged at the same time.

. . . . . .

Jim Chipchase called at No. — Grosvenor Place, and asked to see Mr. Clement Hansell. He was informed that Mr. Hansell had not yet arrived and was not expected for some days. That seemed rather curious to Jim, and that evening he had another talk with his father, and the conversation left them both undecided as to whether Jim's fare who had dropped the letter could have been Mr. Hansell himself. What bothered them was that a man with a house in Grosvenor Place should be driving about London and yet not have arrived. So Jim locked the letter carefully away in a drawer in his bedroom, and decided to pay another visit to Grosvenor Place in a few days.

But the demon of jealousy had entered into the soul of Lobelia Cutts. She described her feelings a day or two later to her bosom friend and confidante, 'Liza Simmons, a young lady who sold wood, coal, sweets, vegetables, and fruit at her father's little greengrocer's shop at the corner of Exton Street.

Lobelia informed Miss Simmons that since she'd discovered that Jim Chipchase was likely to bring a strange female beneath her roof, to sit at the same table and call him by his Christian name before her very eyes, she,

Lobelia, felt as though she'd got the earache in her heart, and she felt inclined to soak a handful of cheap matches in a saucer of water, drink the deadly draught to the dregs, and be found dead in her room with a letter to Jim marked "Private" pinned to her dress.

'Liza Simmons heard her friend's tale, and sympathised with her outraged feelings so deeply, that she wiped the coal-dust off her hand on to her apron and then thrust it into a jar of acid drops, and presented the sufferer with half-a-dozen by way of solace.

Lobelia accepted the gift and exclaimed, with a deep sigh, "Thank you, 'Liza, it's very kind of you, but what's all the acid drops in the world to a woman when the 'eart of the man she loves is another's?" And then, suddenly looking out of the doorway of the shop, she exclaimed, "Oh, look there!"

'Liza Simmons looked and saw nothing in particular, until Lobelia directed her attention to a man who was passing up the street.

"That's our top-floor, Mr. Alison," she said. "He's a real gent, though he only pays a few shillings a week and hasn't any luggage to speak of. But he always goes out of an evenin' quite the swell, I can tell you, with a shirt and a white tie."

Stephen Alison had been to the Bank of England and had cashed one of the fifty-pound notes. He had obtained small notes and ten pounds' worth of gold. The sensation of having so much money about him was entirely novel, and he almost grudged spending any of it on an outfit for a sporting expedition.

If only he could have kept the money and made it the commencement of earning a modest income in England. If he could have remained in London and have journeyed down now and then to Patterdale, and caught a glimpse of his wife and May.

But that was impossible. The proposed expedition with Lord Charlton had not come to him as an honest man, but as a criminal. He went slowly up the street and let himself in with a latch-key.

"I shall have to get back," said Lobelia, "else aunt'll be bullyraggin' me. She's going out this evenin' to uncle's sister's—they've got a birthday or somethin'—and

uncle's goin' to fetch her home after he's done, so she's a-worritin' and a-bustlin' as if she'd got to do a year's work afore she went."

"Then you're going to be all alone?" said 'Liza.

"Yes, I don't suppose none of 'em 'ill be home till after twelve o'clock."

"Look here," said 'Liza, "I've got two orders for a music-hall, what we puts the bill in the winder for regular. Do you think you could come?"

Lobelia hesitated.

"We needn't get there afore half-past seven, and you could get back easy at eleven if we left early; who'd know? You say there won't be nobody at home."

"That's right," said Lobelia; "of course there won't. Mr. Alison, he allus goes out of a evenin', and if he didn't, it don't matter, 'cus he don't never want anythink, and he's got his own key, Yes, I—I think I'll come—I want somethin' to take my thorts off Jim."

"That's a bargain, then," said 'Liza. "You slip out and be round the corner at seven. I'll meet you there, then father won't twig you, and he won't have nothin' to say if your aunt comes in one day."

. . . . . .

Mrs. Chipchase flurried about the house and tidied up and found odd jobs to do, and locked up everything that was capable of being locked up, and generally behaved in a manner which quite justified Lobelia's statement that "you'd think as she was a-goin' away for a year 'stead ot for a evenin'."

At last, however, Mrs. Chipchase was satisfied that she had done everything that was possible to be done in the way of work, and then she had her tea, and found *more* work, but finally she put on her bonnet and mantle, and with strict instructions to Lobelia as to her conduct during the period that she was left in sole charge of the Chipchase household gods, she departed.

As soon as her aunt had had five minutes to get to the top of the street and catch the omnibus, Lobelia ran upstairs to her own room and put on her Sunday clothes, inked over the little split in the pair of kid boots which

had been her best for over eighteen months, and having satisfied herself in her own little private bit of looking-glass that her face was clean, prepared to sally forth on her surreptitious trip to the music-hall with 'Liza Simmons.

She went downstairs and got to the front door, and here something happened which for a moment put her heart in her mouth.

She heard some one coming down the stairs. She knew it must be the top-floor, and that reassured her. After all, he never spoke either to her aunt or her uncle. He was a lodger who, in the language of Exton Street, "kept hisself to hisself," and there was no danger of his referring to the fact that he had seen Lobelia leaving the premises attired in her best.

Stephen Alison saw Lobelia in the hall and addressed her. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, with that gentle politeness which had won Lobelia's admiration from the first. "I'm not going out this evening, and I'm doing some writing, and I shall want more light than I have. Will you let me have a couple of candles?"

"Oh, certingly," said Lobelia; "I'll get 'em for you at once." She went into the kitchen and took a couple of candles from the cupboard and handed them to the lodger.

Then a brilliant idea occurred to her. She would confide in him. "I'm goin' out this evenin'," she said, "but it's privit and I don't want uncle and aunt to know. You won't say nothin', will you?"

Stephen Alison smiled. "Certainly not," he said. "You needn't be afraid."

"And if anybody should knock at the door—not as anybody's likely to—p'r'aps you wouldn't mind answerin' of it, would you, sir?"

"Not at all," said Stephen. He remembered many little acts of kindness the girl had done—little sympathetic attentions that he had greatly appreciated—and he put his hand in his pocket.

"You're going out this evening," he said—"Will you buy yourself a little present?"

He dropped half-a-crown into the astonished girl's hand, and before she could thank him had gone upstairs

to his room again. Lobelia bit her half-crown to make sure it was real, then she hastened to join 'Liza Simmons round the corner. In the sudden access of wealth she was slightly patronising in her bearing and conversation, so much so that before they reached their destination Miss Simmons remonstrated and exclaimed, "'Pon my word, Lobelia, one 'ud think it was you as was takin' me to the 'all with a horder, not me you!"

. . . . . .

Half-an-hour later Mr. Clement Hansell made his way down Exton Street, peering through the gloom of the night at the doors as he passed them in the hope of finding the number that he was in search of. It wasn't a particularly easy task, for the numbers on the doors of Exton Street are of ancient date, and have, in many instances, been smoked and grimed until they have become of the same shade of dirt as the door itself.

But he found the number at last, and hesitated for a moment on the doorstep. Then he summoned up his courage and prepared to go through with the task he had set himself. But he had a sort of hope that when he asked for Stephen Alison he would be told that he was not there, or that he was not in.

He knocked once, gently, and there was no answer. Then he knocked again, loudly, and presently he heard footsteps descend the staircase. A moment later the door was opened.

"Is there any one named Alison——?"

He did not finish the question. Stephen Alison himself had opened the door and was staring at the visitor in astonishment.

He was looking at the living image of himself as he had been at the time he had been released clean-shaven from Portland. There was but one man in the world who could be such a marvellous double of himself as this.

He bent forward and looked keenly in the eyes of the man who stood nervously before him.

The ex-convict and the brother who had brought him to ruin and to shame were face to face at last!

CHAPTER XXII

A MURDERER'S WATCH

At ten o'clock in the morning Lord Charlton's valet knocked at the door of his master's room, and, receiving no answer, opened the door and entered softly to put out his lordship's clothes.

The room was empty, and the valet retired thinking it strange, as he knew that his lordship had intended going to the races, but concluding that his master had remained at an hotel, or gone to a friend's house—or it might be had made a night of it at the card-table. He was quite justified in adding the last conjecture to his list, for he remembered one occasion upon which his lordship and some of his companions had started playing at midnight and had played on until long past noon on the following day.

The servants at Grosvenor Place being familiar with the young lord's "goings on," the valet's statement that he had not been home since the previous evening did not cause any astonishment.

The Earl was equally indifferent. He had long since ceased to be surprised at any eccentricity on his son's part. He had caused him in many ways sufficient anxiety to make him feel rather relieved when he announced his intention of going on a big game expedition.

His health would certainly be materially improved by the change. The atmosphere he would breathe in the Rocky Mountains would be better for him both physically and morally than the atmosphere of the London "haunts" of which he was a constant patron.

The Earl of Powick had quarrelled peevishly with his son at first when the latter contracted heavy debts and came to his father for assistance. He had quarrelled to the extent of declaring that he would not find any more money for the prodigal. Lord Charlton's allowance was a handsome one, and he would have to make his requirements fit it. To come to his rescue continually

was only to encourage him to pile up a fresh stock of liabilities.

Lord Charlton didn't take his father seriously, and having obtained a big advance which the Earl swore should be his final one, he extricated himself from a few pressing liabilities and then contracted fresh ones, and in due course came to his father again.

But he found the Earl adamant, and in this dilemma he went to the West End usurers and obtained advances on such security as he was able to offer.

A run of luck on the Turf came just in time to put him on his feet when he was lying temporarily disabled in a ditch on the road to ruin, but when it became necessary for him to raise money again he found that the big men had had enough of his paper, and having "got out" intended to keep out.

It was at this period of pressure that Jack Darvell introduced him to Gaygold, who lent him a comparatively small sum and compelled him to assign the life assurance for £20,000 which he had still at his disposal. Then his lordship, who had been having rather a bad time of it in town, suddenly thought a change would be beneficial in many ways, and determined to go on a big sporting expedition, which had been the subject of conversation for some time between himself and Darvell, and had been the means of introducing him to "Mr. Stephens."

. . . . . .

The Earl of Powick went into the library after luncheon and spent the afternoon there. It was a cold, cheerless day, and his lordship, who had very few amusements and kept himself as free as possible from social engagements, settled himself in the big chair by the fire and laid himself out to read the *Times*.

There are various ways of reading the *Times*. Some men glance at the money article and the foreign letters and skim the leaders; others look at the births, deaths, and marriages and the advertisements, and some only trouble about the literary matter. The Earl of Powick read the *Times* as a man with nothing particular to do and a day to kill reads anything he picks up first, whether

it be a sensation novel or the hotel advertisements in Bradshaw.

When the Earl took up the *Times* as an occupation he read it deliberately through from the first sheet to the last. It was to him what a "constitutional" is to a man who doesn't particularly care about walking. He started and went on, and when he had finished nothing that he had read had aroused any particular interest. He passed from the prospectus of a new company to an account of the latest murder mystery, from the murder mystery to "Our special correspondent" in Paris, from the Paris news to the proceedings in the Court of Admiralty, and his features never altered once from their fixed expression of wisdom.

Had you asked him a quarter of an hour after he had laid the paper aside for the details of anything he had read, he would not have been able to give them to you. They had not appealed to him sufficiently to make an impression upon him. He had simply "read the *Times*."

But upon the present occasion he was interrupted before he had finished his "constitutional." A servant entered and said that a man had called and wanted to see Lord Charlton.

"Well," said the Earl, elevating his eyebrows, "why do you bother me?"

"His lordship is not in the house, my lord."

"Tell the man so, then."

"I beg pardon, my lord, but the man has something, I believe, my lord—something that belongs to his lordship."

"Very well, take it, and give it to his lordship when you see him."

The servant went out, and the Earl resumed his perusal of the *Times*, but he was interrupted again.

The servant had seen the man, and delivered the message from the Earl, and the man replied that if Lord Charlton was not in he would see the Earl himself.

The Earl was annoyed. He always was annoyed when he didn't have things entirely his own way. He didn't want to be bothered by any one, and here was some one, a total stranger to him, who wouldn't go away when he was told to.

Noticing his hesitation, the servant added, "And he says it's most important, my lord, that he should see somebody."

"Go and ask him his name and his business, then," said he Earl, "and—er—what it is that he has."

The servant went to do as he was ordered, and the Earl slowly thought round the situation.

"It's a dodge to get at Charlton, I expect," he muttered to himself. "Some creditor of his—or a begging impostor."

The servant returned and announced that the man was a pawnbroker, and that he wanted to see some member of the family with regard to an article which had been pledged at his shop that morning.

"Very well, let him come in," said the Earl.

The visitor on entering apologised for intruding on his lordship. His name was Green, and he was a pawnbroker. Early that morning his assistant had taken a gold watch and chain in pledge from a well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking man.

When he, the speaker, arrived at business about ten o'clock, the assistant showed him the watch, as it was a curiosity. It was a presentation watch to a man who had some years ago been hanged for the murder of a woman under very sensational circumstances.

The Earl became impatient. "My good man," he said, "what on earth have I to do with pawned watches and hanged men and sensational circumstances? You've made a mistake, surely."

"No, my lord, not at all. If you'll allow me to explain, you'll understand why I've come here. When I saw that watch I said to my assistant, 'What did the man say when he pawned it? Didn't you ask him any questions about the watch when you saw the inscription?' 'Oh yes,' my assistant replied, 'I asked him, and he said he had bought it some time ago as a curiosity, and being temporarily short of a few pounds he wanted an advance on it.'"

"Well," exclaimed the Earl, "I suppose he had bought it?"

"No, my lord. You see, I happen by the merest accident to know the history of the watch, because a

friend of mine in the trade bought it at the sale of the murderer's effects. He told me only two months ago he'd sold it to a young nobleman who'd taken a fancy to it because of its history, and said he'd wear it himself 'for a lark.' It seems he rather liked that sort of thing."

"Still, I don't see," exclaimed the Earl, "why you want to come and bother me with the history of a murderer's watch. Who was the young nobleman?"

"Your son, my lord—Lord Charlton."

"I'm sure I didn't know it," said his lordship, shrugging his shoulders. "And what do you think—that the watch has been stolen from my son? It might have been—on some racecourse, perhaps, or in the street."

"Of course, my lord—that's what struck me at once. So I thought I'd bring the watch round and see his lordship, to make sure that he hadn't parted with it, before I send word to the police about it."

"Quite right—I understand—but Lord Charlton is not here, and I can give you no information."

"Well—you will excuse me troubling you, my lord. I called at his lordship's address that I found in the directory, and they told me there he'd given up his flat and was living here."

"Wait a moment," said the Earl; "I think perhaps I can get you the information. His valet would probably know. I'll send for him."

Lord Charlton's valet, shown the watch, recognised it as his master's at once.

"When did you see it last?" said the Earl.

"Last night, my lord. I gave it to his lordship when he was dressing to go out to dinner."

"You're quite sure of it?"

"Quite sure. I was bound to see it, because I took it from his dressing-table and put it into his dress waistcoat for him."

"Did his lordship say anything about having lost his watch to you this morning?" asked the pawnbroker.

"I haven't seen his lordship to-day. He hasn't been home since he left to go to a dinner-party last evening."

The pawnbroker looked at the Earl curiously.

"Of course, I don't want to say anything to make you uneasy, my lord," he said, "but Lord Charlton must have been robbed last night—and as you've seen nothing of him since——"

The Earl gathered the pawnbroker's meaning slowly.

"You mean—that something wrong has happened to my son?" he said.

"Well, my lord, it's odd that his watch should have been pawned by a stranger this morning, and nothing been seen of his lordship since last night."

"It is curious, my lord," said the valet, "because his lordship intended to come home. He didn't take a dressing-bag with him, and he told me to call him at ten this morning, as he was going to the races."

The Earl rose from his chair. "It's certainly strange," he said, "but I can't imagine that anything serious can have happened. Still, I think we ought to make some inquiries."

"I know where his lordship dined, my lord," said the servant. "At Mr. Darvell's, a racing gentleman. I can go and find out at what time he left there."

The Earl turned to the pawnbroker. "I'm very much obliged to you for coming," he said. "I'll have inquiries made."

"If you'll take my advice, my lord," said the pawnbroker, "you'll put the matter in the hands of the police at once."

The Earl hesitated. It seemed an absurdity for him to employ the police to find out what had become of his son because he hadn't been home for a night and a day, but there was always the mystery of the stolen watch to justify the inquiry.

"Yes, I think I will," he said.

"If your lordship likes, I'll take the watch to Scotland Yard, and that will give them something to start on."

"Yes, that, perhaps, would be as well," said the Earl. Then he added, testily, to himself, "It's a ridiculous position altogether for Charlton to have placed himself in. If it gets into the papers there'll be a pack of interviewers here."

The pawnbroker bowed himself out, and the Earl was left alone with the valet.

"You will keep this to yourself, Thomson," said the Earl, "at any rate for the present. I don't want any one to know it but ourselves."

"I understand, my lord. Shall I go to the police-station and ask for an inspector to come and see your lordship?"

"Yes—I think you'd better."

CHAPTER XXIII

A SPECIAL EDITION

The Earl thought the disappearance of his heir over to himself, and as he gathered all the surrounding circumstances slowly together he became more and more anxious.

The watch having been pawned early in the morning was the incident that caused him most anxiety. It was absurd to suppose that there could be any circumstances to justify his son sending his watch to the pawnbroker's by a messenger himself.

Whoever had pawned it had become improperly possessed of it. The Earl could not help connecting the loss of the watch with the failure of his son to return home. He might have been attacked and murderously assaulted at an early hour of the morning. He might be lying unrecognised in an hospital.

But that was hardly possible. His son could have been identified by many things, and inquiries would have been made. His clothes would, in themselves, furnish a clue by the marking.

When Thomson, the valet, returned, an inspector from the local police-station came back with him.

Thomson had briefly given the inspector the particulars, and he had, before starting, made inquiries of the men who were on the Grosvenor Place beat the previous night.

One of them had given the startling information that he had seen his lordship towards one o'clock in the morning. He was going along Grosvenor Place accompanied

by another gentleman. The two were chatting together in a friendly manner.

"He came home, then?" exclaimed the Earl.

"Presumably so," replied the inspector; "though, of course, he might have been going with the gentleman to another house in the neighbourhood."

"But if that were the case he would have come home sometime during the night. Under any circumstances he would be home by now."

He looked at his watch, and found that it was past five o'clock.

"Yes, he would have been home by now, one would think, especially as he took no change of clothing with him. He wouldn't be walking about or, for the matter of that, sitting about all day in evening dress."

"It's very extraordinary!" said the Earl; "do you think——?"

"The stolen watch makes it look serious," interrupted the inspector, "and I think the matter should be taken up at once and the disappearance publicly notified. We get most of our information from the public, you know."

"I wish that could be avoided," said the Earl. "I don't want my family affairs placarded all over London by the evening papers."

The inspector shook his head. "I'm afraid that's the shortest way to get a clue," he said; "but if you wish it we'll put it off for an hour or two and make every search we can. Of course, the first thing is to ascertain if his lordship came into the house last night, or passed it with his friend and went somewhere else. I'll question the servants, if you'll allow me."

The servants, who had already an inkling that something was wrong, and that it was connected with Lord Charlton, were called in one by one. The information which the inspector gathered from them was not very much, but it was something.

No one had sat up for his lordship, and every one was in bed at one o'clock. The footman whose duty it was had placed the spirits out as usual, and left the light on in the hall and in the library and on the landings.

"Ah," said the inspector, "and how were the lights this morning—on or off?"

The footman didn't know. One of the underhouse-maids would be the first down, and would be able to answer that.

The housemaid in question had found the light on in the library and on the landings, but out in the hall. She hadn't thought anything of it, as, of course, she didn't know that anything particular had happened.

"That's curious—the hall light being out. Would his lordship put out the light himself?"

"Not in the hall. He might in the library. The landing lights were always left on turned half-down through the night."

The inspector made a note of the hall light, and then returned to the spirit-stand.

The footman explained that he put the spirits on the sideboard and a tray of glasses.

The housemaid, who had been first in the library to clear up, said that the spirit-bottles were on the table and two or three of the glasses had been used.

Some one had smoked in the room, she was quite sure. There was the end of a cigar on the mantelpiece and cigar-ash in the ash-tray on the table. She also swept some up from the hearthrug.

The inspector asked a number of questions, and the servants were allowed to go.

"There is an extraordinary feature in the case," said the inspector, turning to the Earl. "I don't think there can be any doubt that Lord Charlton and the gentleman who accompanied him came in here, and smoked and drank together in the library. Your son must have gone out afterwards. It is quite possible that he left to go somewhere with his guest. The first thing we shall have to do will be to find out who the gentleman is who was in the room with your son last night—or, rather, early this morning. The statement of the constable who was on his beat fixes the time they would have come in at about one in the morning."

"My son's valet knows his movements last night so far as his going to dine with a racing friend. It is possible the gentleman is some one whom he met there."

"That clue is already being followed up. The valet gave us that information at the station, and an officer was

despatched at once to see this Mr. Darvell. Directly we find out the gentleman who accompanied him home, we shall at least have a clue to his further movements—that is, of course, presuming they left this house together."

"I can't think there has been foul play," said the Earl. "A watch can be stolen from a man without anything serious happening to him."

"Yes, but I'm not inclined to think that the watch was stolen in the ordinary way, and I'll tell you why. The ordinary thief wouldn't have gone to a pawnbroker's with it if he had seen the inscription, and a regular thief always looks for crests and names before he risks detection by offering stolen goods in pledge. These things are got rid of in another way—in thieves' language, they 'go into the pot.' My idea is that the person who pawned this watch did not obtain it in an actually dishonest way. We never reckon that an experienced professional thief will go to a pawnbroker's with anything that will cause the pawnbroker to ask questions."

"But as the man had the watch he couldn't have come by it honestly. My son would hardly give his watch to some one to pawn at nine o'clock in the morning."

"No. My idea is that the watch was picked up somewhere by some one who wanted money, and that it was pawned as the quickest way of getting it. By-the-bye, there's one more question I ought to ask his lordship's valet—if he can answer it, it will be exceedingly useful. I had better see him again."

The question the inspector wanted to ask the valet referred to what Lord Charlton was likely to have had with him, articles of value in addition to the watch.

The valet gave a description of the studs and the sleeve-links which his lordship wore. Asked if his master had any large sum of money about him, the valet replied that he thought not. His lordship had given him two fifty-pound notes to change the previous evening, saying he was to get five-pound notes for them. He had been out and failed, and his lordship had said, "Never mind, I must manage without." The two notes, to the best of his belief, his lordship had put back into

a small cash-box which he kept locked up in a drawer in his room. In fact, the valet was sure he put them back, because at the front door he said, "I locked that drawer up, didn't I?" and he, the valet, had gone up to see and had found the drawer locked.

The inspector hesitated. "Of course, it is well known that Lord Charlton is a member of clubs where cards are played for heavy stakes," he said. "It is just possible his lordship returned to get the notes from this drawer before going on to one of these clubs. That might have been the reason he came in and went out again."

The Earl gave a sigh of relief. "Of course," he said; "I should think it was very probable."

"But, in that case, why didn't he come back? At any rate, I'll go up to his lordship's room and see if there are any signs of his having been to the drawer. There may be some slight indication."

Accompanied by the valet the inspector went to Lord Charlton's room. The valet pointed out the drawer.

The inspector pulled it and it came open.

"That settles it," exclaimed the valet. "He must have come back. I'm perfectly certain the drawer was locked after he went out to dinner."

"There's no means of getting the numbers of the notes, I suppose?" said the inspector. "You don't know where he got them?"

"No," said the valet, "but they can be traced, I should think, because his lordship, before sending me out to change them, wrote his name on the back of each of them."

"Well, if he was knocked down and robbed with those notes on him," said the inspector, "we shall very soon hear of them again. The notes would be changed the first thing this morning."

The inspector went downstairs to the library again and informed the Earl of his discovery. He hadn't the slightest doubt now that Lord Charlton had been back to the house for the purpose of getting the notes from his room.

But the pawning of his lordship's watch by a stranger, and the failure of his lordship to return home, justified an immediate police inquiry, and the inspector said he

should like to be furnished at once with a portrait of the missing nobleman.

This was found for him, and the inspector left, promising to return during the evening and give the Earl full particulars of any information that the police might be able to obtain.

The Countess, who had been out all the afternoon, returned shortly after six, and heard from her maid that there was some mystery about her son.

The Earl tried to make light of it, and assured his wife that the inquiry was in consequence of something having been stolen.

The Countess, relieved to find that the matter was not serious, reclined comfortably till nearly seven o'clock, when she sent for her maid, and giving her her own key of the safe in the library, told her to get out the jewel-case. She was going out that evening to a dinner-party, and she wanted to select the jewellery she should wear.

The maid went into the library, opened the wooden door, and fitted the key into the door of the safe.

A footman was in the room at the time, and the girl turned and spoke to him on the subject that the servants were full of.

"Perhaps his lordship's been murdered," she said.

The footman laughed. "Not likely," he said; "he's a queer fish. He's got into some mess or other. He'll turn up all right."

The girl had the door of the safe half-way open as she was speaking. She pulled it right back, and was about to enter and take the box containing the jewel-case, when she saw the white face of a man staring at her from the darkness.

With a wild shriek she sprang back, and the footman ran towards her. He saw the face and uttered a cry.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, "it's his lordship!"

He gave one terrified look at the white face and staring eyes and knew the truth.

Then, panic-stricken, he ran to the front door, and, seeing a policeman passing, called out to him.

"Come in, come in," he shouted. "Lord Charlton's been murdered; I've found the body!"

The policeman followed the footman into the hall.

A young man passing by heard the footman's almost hysterical statement. He was a smart young man, and saw his chance. He jumped into a hansom and told the man to drive as fast as he could go to the office of an evening newspaper.

He had something to sell, and he sold it. Half-an-hour later the boys were tearing up Fleet Street and the Strand with flaring contents bills—

"Terrible Tragedy in Grosvenor Place.
A Nobleman Murdered."

There were no details, for there had been no time to gather any. All that the evening paper that had been fortunate enough to secure the first news could say was, that Lord Charlton had been found murdered at the residence of his father, the Earl of Powick, and that up to the time of going to press it had been impossible to obtain full details of the tragedy.

And so the newspaper hawkers went through the busy streets and the quiet squares yelling aloud with raucous voices the startling statement that a well-known nobleman had been murdered in Grosvenor Place, and late at night in the suburbs they charged twopence for a halfpenny newspaper on the strength of the "sensation."

CHAPTER XXIV

SERGEANT GANNETT'S WAGER

In the horror caused by the ghastly discovery of the body of Lord Charlton in the strong room in the library at Grosvenor Place, everything else was forgotten. The maid ran shrieking hysterically to the servants' hall, and the footman rushed upstairs to the Earl's room to tell him of the terrible discovery.

The Earl could not at first believe that such a thing could have happened. With tottering footsteps he went

to the library. But when he saw his son lying dead his strength deserted him, and he had to be led from the room.

A doctor who had been hastily summoned examined the body, and found that death had been the result of a blow from some heavy instrument which had fractured the skull.

The policeman who had been called in sent a message to the station and took charge of the room, explaining that until his superior arrived he could not allow any one to enter it, or the body in any way to be interfered with.

The inspector who had taken up the case at first was at the house a short time after the message had been despatched. Having seen the doctor and heard his report, he allowed the body to be removed to another room, and proceeded with one of his men to make a minute search of the library.

It was evident that Lord Charlton had been murdered in the house on the previous night. The doctor's statement suggested that death had taken place some twenty hours previously, and that would fix the time at about one or two in the morning.

The object of the murder would not, he thought, be difficult to discover. The placing of the body in the safe proved that the murderer had been able to open it, and that pointed to the possession of a key, because there were no signs of any violence having been used to the door or to the lock.

Directly he ascertained from the servants that the Countess kept her jewels in a box in the safe he made a search for it, and found it had been burst open. An examination of the interior showed at once that the contents consisted solely of the cases—the jewels had all been taken.

Then the inspector thought the case lay in a nutshell. Some one — either in the house or from outside — had obtained the key of the safe and had been in the act of stealing the Countess's jewels when his lordship entered and interrupted them. He was instantly felled to the ground and his senseless body thrust into the safe. The object of this concealment was to delay the discovery as

long as possible, and enable the murderer or murderers to get a good start with their booty.

Further inquiries showed that the key in the Countess's keeping was the only one, and it was difficult to believe that any one had had possession of this on the night in question, as the Countess, after seeing her jewels put away in the tin box and the safe locked, had taken the key to her room and locked it up in a drawer. The drawer was locked when she herself went to it to get the key for the maid that evening. The Countess had made a rule of locking the key away, because, some long time ago, when it was kept in an unlocked drawer in her bedroom, it had been mislaid, and had only been found on the following day lying hidden in a thick fur hearth-rug in the boudoir. The Countess supposed she must have accidentally dropped it herself. To avoid a similar accident and the attendant anxiety, she had since then made it a rule to lock the key up.

With this fact in his possession, the inspector came to the conclusion that the key had been taken from the house at that time, and that what in thieves' parlance is known as "a squeeze of the turn" had been taken and a duplicate made from it.

A careful search of the dead man's clothing had shown that his studs and sleeve-links and watch and chain had been removed, and that his pockets had been emptied. The lining of the pocket of the dress-coat was dragged up a little, as though a hand had been roughly thrust into it and quickly withdrawn in a hurried search.

The pawning of the watch was still a mystery to the inspector, as he felt certain that no man who had committed murder in connection with a robbery would openly pawn the next morning an article which could easily be identified, and which would at once furnish the police with an important clue.

It was now more than ever important to know his lordship's exact movements after he left the house at which he had dined. Whoever the gentleman was who accompanied him to the house, and smoked and drank with him, he would be able to give important information as to the time he left his host, and whether his host went out with him or remained in the house.

It was possible that the two fifty-pound notes which had been taken, evidently by Lord Charlton himself from his own room, had been given to his visitor, or—seeing the character of some of the people with whom his lordship mixed on the racecourses and at the gambling dens—the visitor himself might be implicated in the crime. It might have been "a put-up job"—the man who came home with Lord Charlton might have been the means of bringing an accomplice into the house—the accomplice who had the duplicate key.

. . . . . .

The report of the murder had been telegraphed to every police-station in the Metropolis, in order that not a moment might be lost in getting information which might lead to a clue.

Sergeant Gannett, who had been away in the country for a couple of days in connection with a big hotel swindle, heard the news, and so did Sergeant Verity.

The statement that the murdered man had dined that evening at Mr. Darvell's caused them at once to take a serious personal interest in the mystery.

It was late when Gannett heard of the crime. He had come in by a late train, and only reached the station where he had to make a report at something past ten. Sergeant Verity, who was not on duty, had been at home and had only come out a little previously.

The two men met at the station and heard the particulars almost simultaneously. They ascertained that inquiries made at Darvell's had failed to elicit any information, as Darvell himself had gone out in the morning and had not yet returned to his house, and Mrs. Darvell had gone out for the evening, but her maid couldn't say where. The servants were unable to give any information, as they did not see Lord Charlton leave.

The only person who had been able to say anything at all was old Mr. Joyce, who explained that he wasn't allowed in the dining-room or drawing-room when his son-in-law had company, but that he had been looking over the banisters when the last of the guests were leaving, as he was anxious to see the back of them, and to go and have a chat with his daughter before he went

to bed, and he believed that the person who left with Lord Charlton was a gentleman about whom he knew nothing except that his name was Stephens.

The name was unknown to the police who had made the inquiry, but when Jack Gannett heard it he looked at Sergeant Verity with an air of triumph.

"Darvell may be in this or he mayn't," he exclaimed, "but I'll wager my life that Stephen Alison is. I'm off to Exton Street at once, but it's a hundred to one the bird's flown!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BROTHERS

For a moment the two men stood facing each other on the doorstep; no sound was uttered either by John or Stephen Alison. Many a time in the years since they had parted they had met each other in imagination, and each then had spoken the words that fitted the situation. But now that they had really met, each seemed paralysed by the presence of the other.

Stephen Alison had often repeated aloud to himself in the silence of his prison cell a fierce denunciation of the brother whose wicked act had brought him to ruin and degradation.

John Alison, as his riches increased and the possibility of returning to England in comfort under his new name became a fixed idea, had frequently rehearsed the sympathetic speech of apology and regret with which he would greet his brother, and offer, with the wealth at his command, to make every possible atonement for the past.

But the words which had come so glibly then froze on his lips now, as his eyelids drooped before the keen gaze of the brother he had wronged.

Stephen was the first to find his voice. He had mastered his emotion sufficiently to recognise that, whatever his brother had to say to him, or he had to say to his brother, a front doorstep in Exton Street was a

most unsuitable place for the interview, especially as it was likely to be a stormy one. All the bitterness that Stephen had felt in the early years had been revived by the sight of his brother, but he could hardly give vent to his feelings before the loafers of Exton Street.

He broke the silence by asking his brother to come inside, and John, who was beginning to feel exceedingly uncomfortable, gladly accepted the invitation.

Once the door had closed behind him, John Alison's self-confidence returned,

"Stephen," he said, "I've come back to England a rich man. I have only been here a day or two. Directly I was able to find out where you were I came to ask you to let me make you every reparation in my power for the wrong I did you."

It was dark in the little hall, and the two men could scarcely see each other.

"You'd better come upstairs to my room," said Stephen; "there's a good deal we have to say to each other.

He led the way, and John Alison followed. Opening the door of the little room which had been his home since his release from Portland, the ex-convict turned to his brother—"This is my place," he said. "There is no one in the house but ourselves, so we can talk freely."

John Alison looked round the miserable room, and thought of his own wealth and the comfort which for years his money had brought him. For the first time in his life he felt ashamed of himself.

"Stephen," he stammered, "I—I'm awfully sorry—I should have sent to you, but—but—I knew what had happened, and I couldn't risk my letters passing through the hands of the prison officials."

"You need not make any excuses, John. What you have done in the past is for you to settle with your own conscience. What you are going to do in the future is for you to settle with me. You say you are rich now. Beyond what you owe me—the money of which you defrauded me—I want nothing of you; but I have a wife and a daughter."

"Where are they, Stephen?"

"Away in the country. They have not seen me since I was branded as a felon. I shall never see them again, for my child has been taught to believe me dead, but I owe them reparation for the ruin and the disgrace I brought upon them, and I intend to pay my debt through you."

"I will do anything in my power, Stephen. It is to arrange that that I have sought you out and come here to-night. I can do whatever you wish, for I have made a large fortune in South Africa."

"You must tell me everything now," said Stephen sternly; "there must be nothing kept back. I know that you haven't made your fortune as John Alison, and you haven't returned to London as John Alison—you couldn't very well do that. What do you call yourself now?"

"Clement Hansell."

"What is your fortune?"

"Over a million."

Stephen Alison, who had been standing during their short interview, looked at his brother almost vindictively. The man who had injured him, robbed him, made him a felon, was a millionaire; while he, Stephen, had been a convict, labouring side by side with the vilest of the vile, and the wife and the daughter he had robbed of their home had to live dependent on the charity of a relative.

He felt inclined for a moment to turn fiercely upon his brother, but that would have interfered with the plan which had rapidly shaped itself in his mind. He did not want revenge now, but justice—justice for his wife and child. He sat down on the side of the little bed and motioned his brother to take the chair by the fire-place.

"Let me understand the position thoroughly," he said. "You have just arrived from South Africa—you say you have only been here a few days. Have you come to settle in London, or are you going back again to your property?"

"I have realised all my property, and I intend to settle here. I have taken a house in Grosvenor Place for a

time. I intend, as soon as I have had time to look round, to buy an estate in the country."

"You are not afraid that any one will recognise you — as John Alison — the swindler and the absconding bankrupt?"

Clement Hansell winced.

"Everybody was paid when the business was wound up," he said. "But I have no desire to be recognised as John Alison, and I don't think there is any fear of it. I have changed my appearance considerably. Taking off my moustache has made as great a difference to me as the loss of your beard has to you. We knew each other, but I don't think any one who had known us in the old days would recognise either of us. Come, let bygones be bygones, Stephen. I know that I cannot undo all that you have suffered, but at least I can make the future a peaceful one for you and yours."

"Very well, we will put sentiment aside, and talk business. What do you propose to do for my wife and daughter?"

"Anything you ask me, and for you too. I am prepared to give you the money you lost through me and £50,000 besides. I am not likely to marry, and in my will I have left you all I possess, and in the event of your dying before me, everything is to go to your wife and daughter."

"When can I see that will?"

The millionaire hesitated.

"It is with my papers in the boxes sent on to Grosvenor Place. I haven't taken possession yet, but I am going there to-night when I leave you."

A hundred ideas were whirling through Stephen Alison's brain. If his brother was speaking the truth, if he really was the wealthy man he declared himself to be, the whole course of his, Stephen's, life would be changed. There would be no necessity for him to move a step further in the plot against Lord Charlton. He would be able to defy Darvell, and to warn his intended victim. He might even with this money at his command be able to leave England with his wife—to go somewhere where the truth might be revealed to May, and they might be all happy again together.

But was John Alison speaking the truth—the whole truth—or was he exaggerating and lying in order to secure his brother's silence for a time?

"You are going to this house of yours to-night; I will come with you," he said. "I will come with you now."

Again John Alison hesitated.

"I don't think you'd better come to-night," he said. "The fact is, no one there knows me. As a matter of fact, the servants haven't seen me. The only person who has done so is the butler, and he, I believe, has left. I have sent word that I shall come to-night, but it will be difficult for me to get at all my luggage and search for papers at once. But you can come to-morrow."

"Very well—give me the address." He took an envelope from his pocket—the envelope of the letter Darvell had written him to Kelly's Library.

"Write it down for me," he said.

John Alison took out the gold pencil at the end of his watch chain and wrote the address. Stephen took it and read it over carefully. It was only a few doors below the Earl of Powick's. The coincidence brought a bitter smile to his lips. He had been the previous evening only a few doors from the residence of a millionaire brother, and he had, in order to get a few decent clothes to go away in, had to take money from a man whom he had been engaged to murder.

"Very well," he said, "I'll call on you to-morrow. What time?"

"Make it evening. Say nine o'clock—that will have given me time to attend to some matters of business that I must arrange. I have to go to the bank to which my account and my securities have been transferred from Johannesburg and introduce myself. I have to find a solicitor to act for me. I have only been a day or two in London staying at an hotel, you see, and I have really done nothing and seen no one yet. I haven't thought about business—my first object was to find you."

"And now that you have found me?"

"I must do something to make myself known."

"As Clement Hansell?"

"Naturally. You see, my position at present is an

extraordinary one. I haven't presented a single letter of introduction, and there is no one who knows me and can identify me as Clement Hansell. When I go to Grosvenor Place to-night the latch-key and the letter from the house agent who sent it to me will be my sole authorities to the servants who are to look upon me as their master. I am absolutely starting a new life."

"I understand," said Stephen, "and I can quite appreciate the value of the position—to you. Mr. Clement Hansell has been busy the last day or two in ascertaining if any one was likely to recognise him as John Alison."

"No. I confess that I *was* a little anxious on that score, and I went to the City and saw plenty of people who knew me intimately years ago, and not one of them showed the slightest token of recognition. The fact of my being so entirely unknown to any one in London as Clement Hansell is the result of circumstances not of my own arranging. But don't let us talk any more about myself—I want to hear *your* views, your plans—I want you to think out between now and to-morrow the best way in which I can assure your own future, and that of your wife and child."

"Very well. I'll think things over, and I'll come to you at Grosvenor Place to-morrow at nine."

The millionaire rose to go. He was intensely relieved that the interview had been as calm as it had been, for he had anticipated fierce resentment on Stephen's part.

He held out his hand. But Stephen shook his head.

"Not yet, John," he said. "I'll wait for that until I know a little more of Mr. Clement Hansell."

The name brought a sudden thought to John Alison's mind. "By-the-bye," he said, "when you come you'll have to give your name to a servant, of course—I don't think it will be well to give your real one."

"Why not?"

"Yours was a celebrated case, I understand," stammered the millionaire—"and—and the name may be still remembered."

"I don't choose to take a false name to call upon

my brother—the man whose treachery was the means of making me a criminal! I shall come as Stephen Alison."

John Alison, whose courage had risen when he found his brother more amenable to reason than he had expected him to be, faced the situation boldly. After all, Stephen was a penniless ticket-of-leave man living in one room, and he was not likely for a trifle like this to sacrifice the future of his wife and child. So, altering his tone and his manner, he turned to his brother with a new look in his face.

"If I am to do as I have promised this evening, Stephen," he said, "you must not come to my house in the name borne by a convict—a name registered on the books of the police. I won't have it."

"I shall come as I have said. You can receive me or not as you choose. I will ask for *you* by your false name, but I will come in my own."

"Then," exclaimed the millionaire angrily, "you need not come at all. I will not receive you."

His temper had got the better of him. He was angry at being thwarted just as he thought he had got his own way.

"I shall call, nevertheless."

"You will be told that Mr. Clement Hansell is not at home."

Stephen stepped a pace towards his brother, and looking him straight between his eyes, said quietly, "Then I shall ask for Mr. John Alison."

It was a threat which Stephen would never have carried out. He had lost the desire for revenge, but his pride rebelled at the idea of his brother reminding him of the disgrace which attached to his name—the disgrace which would not have been attached to it had not John Alison been a scoundrel.

But the threat terrified the millionaire. He felt that he had made a false move—that in revealing himself to his brother he had placed himself at his mercy.

He stood silent for a moment, thinking over the dilemma. He felt helpless, and the knowledge of his helplessness increased his rage. Raising his eyes he looked angrily at Stephen, and was about to make a

furious reply when he staggered, and, putting his hand to his heart, reeled back against the bed.

In a moment Stephen was by his side. "John, John!" he cried, "what's the matter? I—I didn't mean it. Your secret is safe with me. I——"

John Alison tried to motion his brother away. "Get me some brandy—quick!" he said. "It's my heart. They warned me. Ah!"

He fell over on to the bed, and Stephen saw that his face was bathed in perspiration.

"Brandy!" he gasped; "brandy—quick!"

Stephen Alison seized his hat and ran downstairs and across the street to the public-house. He bought a glass flask of brandy, and ran back with it.

When he got to the house a man was passing by with newspapers and yelling aloud: "Awful tragedy in Grosvenor Place; Murder of Lord Charlton."

The words struck on Stephen Alison's ears like a thunderclap. Dazed, bewildered, he thrust some coppers in the man's hand, and, seizing a paper, opened the door and ran upstairs to his room.

He heard a deep groan, and, going to the bed, drew the cork from the flask and put it to his brother's lips.

With a desperate effort the millionaire tried to raise himself to drink—the little that had gone down his throat had almost choked him.

But the effort was too much for him. With a look of agony and terror in his eyes he gave one gurgling cry and fell back—dead!

CHAPTER XXVI

GAYGOLD AND CO.

Mr. Sampson Gaygold sat in his private office in one of the narrow streets running off the Strand down to the Thames. Mr. Gaygold was a short, stout little man of about five-and-thirty, with a small fair moustache, greenish eyes, and an oily smile.

Mr. Gaygold's father came to this country from Poland, where his name was Solomon Smolensky. It was as Solomon Smolensky, when he rose to be principal cutter at an East End firm of tailors, that he took to wife a young Polish lady, and was in due course blessed with a son who was called Solomon after his father.

Before young Solomon was fifteen his father, who had been combining a little money-lending with the tailoring business he had started on his own account, made a serious mistake with regard to a bill transaction, and found himself on speaking terms with one of Her Majesty's judges, and later on the inmate of a substantial building in which he was generously provided with board, lodging, and clothes gratis. It had been intended that Mr. Smolensky should enjoy the hospitality of the British Government for five years, but before eighteen months had expired the guest-chamber was vacant. Mr. Smolensky, worried possibly at the idea that he wasn't allowed to pay for anything, fell into a low, weak state, and passed quietly away in the prison infirmary.

Two years later Mrs. Smolensky married again, and young Solomon, who was a clerk in a wholesale house in Houndsditch, was left to find a home for himself. It was then that he fell in with a young fellow of his own persuasion whose father kept a loan office, and to this office Solomon was irresistibly attracted. At the age of twenty-eight, having found the capital in some mysterious way, he determined to do things on a big scale. He deserted the East for the West, opened an office in the neighbourhood of the Strand, fixed a brass plate outside the door, "Sampson Gaygold & Co.," and advertised his willingness to lend money to noblemen and others on note of hand only.

He might possibly have done well. Money-lending on genuine commercial principles is by no means a bad business, but the paternal "crook" was in young Solomon's veins, and from the first he tried to best his customers and descended to shady transactions, which, becoming known, kept the better-class clients away from him.

He had overreached himself, and in more than one instance had lost his money. He declared that this was

the result of "going straight," and, eager for the wealth which some of his confrères seemed to make so easily, he had lately conceived a scheme of finance which, while being comparatively safe, would yield a substantial income.

The scheme was simplicity itself. It was to employ as his touts certain gentlemanly scamps, who were thrown constantly into the society of extravagant young men with expectations or rich relatives. The young men were to be worked in such a way that they would obtain money under circumstances which would lay them open to prosecution for fraud. The fear of a criminal charge would induce his victims or their relatives to pay up, without disputing the amount of the aggrieved money-lender's claim.

Encouraged by the success which had hitherto attended his efforts he had become bold, and now he had readily entered into the scheme connected with Lord Charlton, which Jack Darvell, who had lately acted as a "tout," had suggested to him.

When Cecil Halford came to him in a fix for £150 which he had lost at cards, and, being pressed for money in other quarters at the time, was unable to pay, Mr. Gaygold took the young man's acceptance for £200, and in a clever way induced the young fellow, who wanted the money at once as it was a debt of honour, to put his father's name and address on the back.

The idea that he was committing forgery never entered the young man's head. He wrote his name and address at the request of the money-lender, in the money-lender's presence, and there was therefore no attempt at fraud or deception of any kind.

But it was the first step. Mr. Gaygold calculated that when the bill became due young Halford would be unprepared or unwilling to pay it. Young men who borrow at exorbitant interest are never anxious to pay cash if pen and ink and a bill stamp are suggested to them as an alternative. Cecil Halford would call and ask for time. Mr. Gaygold would then suggest a further small advance, and take a bill for a considerably larger amount. But he would inform his victim that it must be indorsed with his father's name as the other was. He knew that the young

man wouldn't go to his father, and he concluded that, wanting the money, he would do as he had done before —write the name himself. Then he would have his prey in his clutches and the rest would be easy. If the young man couldn't find the money to meet Mr. Gaygold's claim, his father would. Men in Captain Halford's position don't let their only sons face a criminal charge if they are rich enough to prevent it.

But the money-lender had decided that his intended victim was not likely to play into his hands. He hadn't been a bit frightened at the vague hint of criminal proceedings (Mr. Gaygold had not informed him on what grounds he based the charge), and he hadn't asked for a renewal. All he had said was, "Well, you'll have to let it stand over for a bit, and I'll pay it by-and-by, with the interest."

Mr. Gaygold made up his mind that he had better play the card he held and get as much as he could out of Captain Halford on the present deal, and get rid of a client who wasn't likely to be profitable.

So he had written the letter which had caused the Captain to leave the Hermitage hurriedly with May and hasten to town, a prey to the most terrible anxiety and grief.

. . . . . .

There was a knock at the inner door which shut Mr. Gaygold away from the clerk's office.

"Come in—What is it, Mr. Bliss?"

A good-looking young fellow of about seventeen, with wavy brown hair and frank blue eyes, entered the sanctum.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Captain Halford wishes to see you."

"Oh! Is he alone?"

"No, sir—there's a young lady with him. Shall I show the Captain in, sir?" asked the clerk.

"No—let him wait. Say I'm busy—I'll see him in ten minutes. Give him the newspaper to read. Fold it open at the police news. See?"

The clerk withdrew to obey his instructions, and Mr. Gaygold looked after him admiringly. "Nice boy that—

gentlemanly — good-looking young fellow. I shall get some more of that sort."

Mr. Gaygold when he reorganised his business had determined to keep his fellow-religionists off his premises as much as possible. He wanted to encourage his clients to think they were dealing with a benevolent individual whose sole desire was to get them out of a difficulty. So he wasn't going to give the game away by having a wide-awake, cunning-looking clerk in his office. The young gentleman who at present occupied the next office was the son of a sea captain. Gaygold had ruined the father and taken the boy on as clerk at £1 a week. The name of Bliss tickled him immensely. His favourite joke to a client was, "Ah, you'll always find Bliss in my office!" He gave Master Bliss ten shillings a week, and credited his father's account with the balance.

Master Bliss was a decided find. The young fellows who came to the office, seeing his frank English face, lost all their terror of the Jew money-lender. And the old fellows felt almost ashamed of themselves for coming to ask for more time. They would have liked to have handed Master Bliss the bank-notes and said, "Give these to Mr. Gaygold, my boy—it is what I owe him—and there's a sovereign for yourself."

When Mr. Gaygold had kept Captain Halford waiting a quarter of an hour he rang the bell and told young Bliss to show the gentleman in. Then he pushed his chair away, stood with his back to the fire, and assumed the most benevolent smile of which he was capable.

Captain Halford entered the room of the money-lender with faltering footsteps. He was leaning on May's arm for support. Mr. Gaygold, who had a keen eye for female beauty, looked at May admiringly, and thought he had never seen such a sweet face before.

"I am very pleased to see you, Captain Halford," he said; "pray be seated. But if we are going to talk business, had not this young lady better——"

"This young lady is my niece, sir," replied the Captain, straightening himself up with an effort—"she knows the object of my visit to you."

"I see—family confidence—nothing like family confidence, eh? I am sorry I have had to apply to you for

the amount I advanced your son, but, of course, as you indorsed the bill you were quite prepared for the demand."

"Enough, sir. I have seen my son in town this morning, and he tells me that you advanced him £150 on his acceptance."

"I have your son's acceptance for £200 and it is indorsed by you. If we are going to make this a purely business transaction, that is how the matter stands."

"My indorsement, sir, is a——"

"Ah, Captain," exclaimed Mr. Gaygold, glancing sympathetically at May, "pray—pray do not tell me that it is *not* your indorsement. It would distress me more than I can say. Your son is such a charming young man—such a very charming young man."

The Captain, who had been listening with clenched fists to the money-lender's praise of his son, was about to give vent to his feelings when May placed her hand warningly on his arm.

"Uncle," she said, with a little gasp.

"Don't be afraid, May—I know the man I'm dealing with. Come, sir, I've had enough of your canting humbug. Give me the bill and I'll give you the money."

The Captain put his hand in his pocket and drew out a roll of bank-notes.

"Let me see," said the money-lender. "The bill's several days overdue — I shall want £220. You see, there's the notary's charge, and the office expenses, and the letters I've written."

This time the Captain exploded. "You scoundrel!" he said. "My son has told me everything. You gave him £150 for the bill, and you induced him to write my name on the back. He wrote it in your presence, at your request, and you have the infernal impudence to demand the money of me on my indorsement."

Mr. Gaygold flung up his hands and raised his eyes to the ceiling with horror.

"Oh, what a wicked young man!" he exclaimed. "He brought me the bill with your indorsement on it, and said he'd got you to do it. That's why I let him have the cash. But now that you tell me it is a forgery, I cannot take your money, sir. Put up your notes—I will not compound a felony."

"What!" exclaimed the Captain, trembling with rage, "you dare! I'll send for the police—I'll have you up at the Old Bailey, you infamous scoundrel—I'll—I'll——"

May, terrified, lifted her eyes imploringly to her uncle.

"I'm sorry for you, miss," said Gaygold quietly, "very sorry, but I can't part with a forged document, and your uncle's accusation that I was a party to the fraud is a very serious one—very serious."

"Are you going to give me that bill?" exclaimed the Captain.

"You had better come and see me to-morrow alone. I'll—I'll think about it. I must consult my solicitor. I ought to put the matter in the hands of the police and have your son arrested at once. But I won't do anything rash—for the young lady's sake. Come, Captain, you'd better sleep on it, and call again to-morrow, and come in a good temper. I shall expect you at twelve."

He opened the door, and the Captain, who by this time had begun to see that he had not been diplomatic, controlling himself with an effort, took May's arm again and went out.

Mr. Sampson Gaygold went back to the fireplace and resumed his favourite attitude.

"He'll give me £300 for that bill to-morrow. If he doesn't I'll frighten him out of his life. He'll do anything rather than risk a police court case. I believe he'd pay £500 for the sake of his son's good name. Ah, what a fine thing that 'good name' is for our business. But it must be deuced expensive to the——"

He stopped suddenly. On the corner of the table against which the Captain's niece had been leaning, lay a little cambric handkerchief.

Sampson Gaygold walked across the room, picked it up, and examined it.

In the corner was the name of the fair owner—"May Alison."

The money-lender knitted his brows. "That's odd," he said. "Stephen Alison is the man Darvell's got to do the Charlton business for us—it isn't a common name. I must find out a little more about that young lady before the Captain calls to-morrow."

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CHAPTER XXVII

EXIT STEPHEN ALISON

For a minute or two Stephen Alison stood dazed by the dead body of his brother.

The shock had temporarily deprived him of the power of thought. Staring with dilated eyes at the inanimate form lying so ghastly still upon the bed—the features drawn in pain and looking terrible in the dim candle-light—he forgot everything else. Even the startling news which he had just heard cried aloud in the street had been obliterated from his mind.

But as he turned with a choked sob of horror from the bed on which his dead brother lay, his eyes fell upon the newspaper which had fallen from his hand upon the floor.

Then in one swift flash of thought the other tragedy was borne in upon him.

He picked up the paper with a trembling hand and found the big headline—

"Murder of a Nobleman."

There were no details given. But there, staring him in the face, was the fact that Lord Charlton, the man whom he had been hired to kill, the man with whom he had been alone in the dead of night, had been found murdered. The report said nothing as to time—nothing as to surrounding circumstances—only that Lord Charlton's murdered body had been discovered by the servants in the library at Grosvenor Place.

He tried to think things out. The murder could hardly have been committed in the daytime in a busy house. He turned to the paper again and read the paragraph:—

"The news has just reached us that Lord Charlton was found murdered to-day in the library at the residence of

his father, the Earl of Powick. There is no clue at present to the assasssin."

The body was discovered "to-day." It might be that it had been discovered that morning and the news had only been communicated to the papers that evening.

Overwhelmed by the horrors that had come so suddenly upon him, his brain reeled.

The only thing that shaped itself in his mind clearly was that he, a convict released on licence, had made the murdered man's acquaintance under a false name, and had been alone with him in this very library the previous night.

He had received money from Lord Charlton—bank-notes bearing his indorsement. One he had changed at the Bank of England, one was still in his breast-pocket. He, a penniless ticket-of-leave man, had nearly a hundred pounds about him, Lord Charlton's money.

Darvell would know why the money had been given him, but Darvell had practically hired him to do the very deed that had just been committed.

One thing he felt was certain—that his connection with the victim would soon be known to the police, and that the circumstances were quite suspicious enough, providing the real assassin was unsuspected, to warrant his arrest.

And then he would be brought before a magistrate. The newspapers would be filled with the details of his case. The story of his life would be dragged forth again. The world would ring with his name and everybody would believe that, whether he was the actual murderer or not, he was implicated in the crime.

He grew nervous and trembled. A cold sweat gathered on his brow. He expected every moment to hear the cry of the mob in the street outside—to hear the officers of justice beating at the door and demanding admission.

What could he do? Leave his brother lying there dead alone and escape while he had the chance?

No, flight would serve only to justify the suspicion which was certain to attach to him.

Suddenly an idea came to him. He remembered that he was alone in the house. No one had seen his brother come in, no one knew that they had been together.

He bent over the lifeless form, gazing with terrified but searching eyes at the features.

How like John was to him. He remembered the troubles caused in their early manhood by their startling resemblance. He remembered how he had worn a beard and his brother only a moustache, in order to put an end to the awkward mistakes which were constantly being made by friends and acquaintances.

John Alison had shaved off his moustache for greater security when he came to England as Clement Hansell. Stephen had grown his since his release from Portland. If his upper lip were shaved he would be the living image of Clement Hansell. But for the clothes, the dead body on the bed might be that of Stephen Alison, the ex-convict.

But Stephen Alison was not clean-shaven, and—

In desperate straits men think quickly. The thought that came swiftly to Stephen Alison was acted upon instantly.

An old pair of scissors which he had borrowed from his landlady that morning lay upon the mantelshelf. To cut his moustache off was the work of a minute. Then taking a razor from the drawer where he kept it he made a lather in the soap-dish, and in a minute his upper lip was clean.

There was a rickety toilet-glass on the chest of drawers. He looked at himself in this, and then went back to the bed and scrutinised the features of the millionaire.

He had made his plan of escape—which would enable him not only to avoid arrest and all the ignominy of a trial, but which would give him the chance of peace—perhaps happiness—for the remainder of his days.

The details of the strange story his brother had told of his being practically unknown in London marshalled themselves in orderly array in his mind, which was now concentrated on one idea.

Clement Hansell's fortune was his now—legitimately his, for his brother had left him everything in his will. The servants at Grosvenor Place were expecting their master that night, but his latch-key and the agent's letter were to be his sole introduction.

Clement Hansell was even unknown to his bankers,

to whose care the sums realised by the sale of his properties in South Africa had been transferred.

Clement Hansell had come to London known to no one. He had come to begin a new life, and he had not yet begun it. Every circumstance was favourable to the execution of the scheme which Stephen in his desperation had conceived.

With trembling fingers he searched in the dead man's pocket, and found a bunch of keys at the end of a chain. One of the keys was evidently a latch-key. Cut upon the handle was the number of the house in Grosvenor Place.

In the breast-pocket were a number of memoranda and letters. Among them was the agent's letter which had been sent with the key.

Stephen Alison hesitated for a while, then he made up his mind to carry out the wild idea that had come into his brain.

From that moment he concentrated himself upon the task that lay before him. Powerful man as he was, he would not have been able to accomplish it but for the almost superhuman strength which in moments of imminent peril seems to brace the nerves and harden the muscles even of weak women.

Slowly and carefully he divested the body of his brother of its clothing. That task accomplished, a more difficult one remained. He had to dress the body of a dead man in the clothes of a living one — dress it without haste, without neglect, so that to the trained eyes which would presently be fixed upon it, the dead body should show nothing which could cause suspicion or suggest a doubt."

The task took him nearly an hour. When it was finished his strength suddenly deserted him, and for a moment he felt that he was going to faint.

But he rested a minute or two and recovered himself, and then, with a face from which every vestige of colour had fled, he contemplated the result of his gruesome task.

The body that lay upon the bed was dressed in Stephen Alison's clothes. In the pockets were the unchanged bank-note indorsed "Charlton," and the smaller notes

which Stephen had received at the Bank of England. In the breast-pocket were some old papers of Stephen Alison's and Stephen Alison's ticket-of-leave. He had not neglected a detail in his efforts to transfer his identity to the dead.

He dressed himself carefully in the clothes which he had removed, and once more looked in the little glass. But for the ashy greyness of the face it was Clement Hansell who looked back at him from the mirror. The likeness was so complete that Stephen at the first glance started. It seemed to him that the dead man had come to life and was standing before him.

Satisfied that so far there was no flaw, Stephen looked carefully round the room.

The traces of the removal of his moustache were still there, and he decided to leave them. The first thing that any one who had known Stephen Alison would remember in connection with the body would be that the moustache had gone. The evidence would be in the room, that Stephen some time previously to the heart attack which had proved fatal had removed it.

If the police were the first to enter the room they would conclude that the ex-convict, alarmed lest he should be identified as the man Stephens who had gone home with Lord Charlton, had determined to remove his moustache in order to disguise himself until he was safe out of the country.

With the exception of ten pounds in gold which he kept in case of accidents, the money which the police would presume had been taken from Lord Charlton was on the person of the dead man.

Nothing was lacking to complete the chain of evidence as to his identity.

When everything was concluded, a new terror struck a chill to Stephen's heart. There was no one in the house, but he had to get out of it. Would any one notice him leaving—would there be some one watching already?

He didn't think that the police would be there in connection with the murder yet, because he felt sure that at the first inkling they obtained that he might be connected with it, they would come to the house and knock and demand admission.

So far he was safe, but Exton Street was generally anything but deserted at this time of night, and he might be seen casually by some one who, when the police began to make inquiries, would give information.

But that risk was one he was bound to run. The time was getting on, and every moment was of value.

He took one farewell glance at the lifeless form upon the bed, and then, with a prayer for mercy upon his lips, he went out of his door and stole cautiously down the stairs.

In the little hall he listened for a moment or two. The street was unusually quiet. Then he opened the door and stepped out into the night.

He walked rapidly along Exton Street and turned into Euston Road, and in Tottenham Court Road he hailed a hansom and drove as far as Hyde Park Corner.

There he got out and walked along Grosvenor Place till he found the number he was looking for.

As he came to the Earl of Powick's residence he saw a crowd of idlers gathered on the pavement. They were discussing the tragedy, and gazing with curious eyes at the silent house, in which the body of the murdered man was still lying.

Stephen Alison's heart almost stood still, but he passed through quickly, and only a confused murmur fell upon his ears.

A few minutes later he turned his latch-key in the door of Clement Hansell's house and entered boldly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOBELIA'S EVENING OUT

LOBELIA CUTTS was not altogether at her ease at the music-hall, to which she had gone with an order at the invitation of her friend Miss Simmons, the greengrocer's daughter. She got a seat which did not afford her a good view of the stage, and her line of sight was further interrupted by the presence immediately in front of her

of a tall young woman who wore a wide hat with high feathers.

It was particularly annoying to Lobelia, whose evenings out were rare, to find herself in a position in which she could see so little for her money, or rather for her order. She heard the people screaming with laughter at the antics of the knockabouts, but she hadn't the slightest idea what they were doing, and so she couldn't laugh herself. She heard roars of approbation when the great Little Squiggles, at the end of his celebrated comic song, obliged with a dance, but as all she could see of the great Little Squiggles was the top of his hat—occasionally—she couldn't join in the demonstration.

Miss Simmons was more fortunate, and grew hot and excited as the evening advanced. She yelled at the jokes of the comic singers; she sat open-mouthed and breathless when the acrobats stood on each other's heads and shoulders, and she shrieked so hysterically at the antics of a little man who came on as a charwoman afflicted with kleptomania and a weakness for a "drop of something short," that Lobelia dug her elbows rather spitefully into her friend's ribs, and begged her not to make an exhibition of herself. Whereat Miss Simmons grew indignant, and asked Lobelia who she was talking to, and had she, Lobelia, treated Miss Simmons, or had she, Miss Simmons, treated Lobelia?

The argument grew wordy, and eventually Miss Simmons told her friend to "shut it." She came out to enjoy herself, and she didn't want to be taught manners by a step-cleaner.

"Don't you call me a step-cleaner," muttered Lobelia angrily. "I'm as good as you any day. You've got a lot to be stuck up about, haven't you?—'cus your father sells coals and 'taturs! Step-cleaner, indeed! If I was I'd come and clean your steps for nothin'—they wants it."

There was a hurricane of applause as a popular favourite came on, and Miss Simmons, informing her friend that she'd talk to her when they got outside, gave her heart and soul to the entertainment.

Lobelia, balked of the pleasure she had anticipated, angry with her friend, and generally upset by the "con-

trariness" of things, resigned herself to her fate, and sat back and nursed her wrath, and fell into a melancholy condition generally.

If she had enjoyed herself probably she wouldn't have given a thought to the deserted house in Exton Street until the performance was over. But having nothing to distract her attention, she began to think over the boldness of her action in thus leaving the house to take care of itself.

Suppose a friend or acquaintance of her aunt's called. The top-floor might answer the door—he had promised to—but he would have to say that no one was at home, and this would eventually reach her aunt's ears. And then there would be trouble. Lobelia was afraid of her aunt, and though she "cheeked" her in a spirit of free-born British independence, she always took care to make her rude remarks when the person to whom they were addressed couldn't possibly hear them.

The fear of fire suggested itself, but that was dismissed. She had seen that the fires in the kitchen and in the little front room were low before she left—she knew that if she got back by eleven she would have plenty of time to relight the front room fire before her aunt and uncle returned, because it was understood that they wouldn't be home till after midnight.

Then she began to think about the top-floor. *She* liked him, but her aunt had never quite got over her first suspicions. Was she right to have come away and left a man without any luggage to speak of alone in the house? She didn't think that he'd get a van and move the furniture, but she believed that her aunt had money in some mysterious place that did duty for the old stocking and the teapot in which the elderly ladies of fiction keep gold and bank-notes to produce at the dramatic moment.

Suppose the top-floor mystery in evening dress *was* a bad man, and took advantage of her absence to go ferreting about in search of her aunt's hidden treasure. It would be sure to come out, when the loss was discovered, that Lobelia had deserted her post in the hour of danger, and then the rest of her life would be embittered by the scathing remarks which her aunt would continually

utter in the presence of Jim. If Jim brought his young woman to tea probably they would also be detailed in the presence of the "hated rival."

The idea of being "bullyragged" in the presence of this female serpent whom Jim was about to introduce to the domestic hearth of the Chipchases was too much for Lobelia. It destroyed the last possibility of her extracting the slightest amusement from the glimpses of the stage she was able to catch between the ostrich feathers of the young woman in front.

So with the usual perversity of human nature she sought to pick a quarrel with her friend Miss Simmons in order to make herself believe that Miss Simmons, and not her own conscience, was the cause of her evening's misery at a music-hall.

She succeeded admirably, and when, after being called everything but a lady, Miss Simmons eventually told her friend to "shut up" or she'd slap her face, Lobelia felt that the moment for action had come. So she rose, with a flushed face and flashing eyes, and after informing Miss Simmons that if she ever presumed to address her either in terms of friendship or enmity again she'd "mark her," she pushed her way through the crowded gallery and gained the exit.

When she got out into the street she began to mutter to herself, and before she got home she was fully convinced that Miss Simmons had behaved like a cat, and she felt so indignant that she soliloquised aloud.

"Catch me going out with 'er again. Not if I knows it; not me!" she exclaimed. "Who's she, I'd like to know, with her orders for the gallery? Next time I goes to a 'all I'll pay, and go decent. Who's she, with 'er coke and 'er cabbage-stalks, to give 'erself hairs and graces? That for 'er—and 'ow long is it since 'er father only 'ad a donkey barrer?"

. . . . . .

It was half-past ten when Lobelia reached Exton Street and let herself in with the latch-key. She was a little nervous, for as she approached the house her guilty conscience reasserted itself and the misdeeds of Miss Simmons were forgotten.

Lobelia opened the door of the little sitting-room cautiously and peered in. The fire was out. She struck a match, found the lamp and lighted it, and looked round. Everything was as she had left it. She went into the kitchen, and there a solemn silence reigned, disturbed only by the occasional chirp of a cricket.

With a deep sigh over the failure of the evening to which she had looked forward with such eager anticipation, the little drudge went upstairs to her room and discarded her Sunday best with tearful eyes. She listened to hear if the top-floor was moving about, but she could not catch a sound. But she saw the candle-light under the crack of the door, and she concluded he was writing. Then she went downstairs, and putting some sticks and some torn paper under the dead coals proceeded to light the fire in the sitting-room. Her orders were to let the kitchen fire out. Jim had arranged to get his supper before he came in, as his mother would not be able to cook anything for him.

The night, though bright, was cold, and she knew that her uncle would expect a fire when he returned, and if the fire had gone out her aunt would at once jump to the conclusion that Lobelia had done the same.

She had just got the sulky coals to burn up into the suspicion of a blaze, and was picking up the ends of burnt stick that had fallen on the hearth in order that their presence should not betray the relighting to the eagle eye of her aunt, when a loud knock at the door brought her heart into her mouth and made her leap to her feet.

"Good gracious! Whoever's that?" she exclaimed. "It can't be aunt. It must be somebody called. It's lucky I'm in."

She went to the door and opened it cautiously, and was astonished to see two gentlemen on the doorstep. The men looked at the girl keenly as the light of the street lamp fell upon her face.

"Anybody but you in?" said one of them.

"No, sir; if you want my aunt, she's out at a party."

"Who's your aunt?—the landlady?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well, don't be frightened, my child. We've got

to come into the house. We want to see the gentleman who lodges here, a Mr. Alison. You are the girl that let me in when I came to see him once before."

"Yes, sir, I recollect you now. Mr. Alison's upstairs, sir; but I don't know if I ought to let you in, being all alone. Would you mind waiting on the step while I go up and fetch him?"

"We'd better tell the girl who we are, eh, Gannett?" said Sergeant Verity; "we shall frighten her more if we don't."

He turned to Lobelia, and in his most fatherly manner endeavoured to calm her evident fears by explaining that he and his friend were police officers in private clothes.

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Lobelia, "our lodger hasn't done anything wrong, has he?"

"I don't know, my dear," said the sergeant. "It's awkward your being in the house alone, but you needn't be afraid. See, here's a constable—you call him to the door if you like, and he'll tell you we're not burglars."

Verity beckoned to the constable, who came up and was hurriedly made acquainted with the situation.

"You'd better step inside and stop with the little girl while we go up," said Gannett. "The child may be frightened and call out." Then turning to Lobelia, he said, "Now, my dear, you go into the room with the constable. We're only going to ask your aunt's lodger to give us a little information. Don't be frightened."

Lobelia, who was pale and trembling, for the idea of police in the house in her aunt's absence had frightened her, as she afterwards explained to Jim, "out of a year's growth," followed the uniformed officer into the little sitting-room and dropped into a chair, wondering whether she should faint, or cry, or both, and the Sergeants Verity and Gannett went upstairs.

"I know the way," said Verity, speaking under his voice. "Follow me, Jack, and mind how you come—the stairs are a bit creaky."

"All right, William—we're in luck in finding him in. I can't make it out. I'd have bet he'd have showed London a clean pair of heels the first thing this morning."

"Hush!" said Sergeant Verity, in a whisper—"there's a light in the room. He's there right enough."

"Do you think he'll show fight?" said Gannett, taking a revolver from his pocket. "He's most likely got a barker about him. Let me go first."

The two men crept on tiptoe to the door. Gannet took the handle gently, turned it softly, and opened the door half an inch.

"It isn't locked," he whispered. Then raising his revolver he called out to his companion, "Now!"

Flinging the door wide open he sprang into the room, closely followed by Verity.

"Hanged if he isn't fast asleep," exclaimed Gannett, as he lowered his revolver and pointed to the motionless figure on the bed.

Sergeant Verity took a step forward and bent over the silent figure and peered into the face. Then he uttered a cry of astonishment.

"We're too late!" he exclaimed. "Stephen Alison is dead!"

CHAPTER XXIX

WHAT THE POLICE FOUND

The first thought of Sergeant Gannett as he gazed at the lifeless form of the man lying on the little bed was that Stephen Alison had committed suicide.

"You go and get a doctor at once, William," he said, "and I'll stop here. He's as dead as a door-nail, but we must have a doctor."

Sergeant Verity stood for a moment silent in the dimly-lighted room.

"Poor chap," he said, and his memory wandered back to the happy English home to which his duty had taken him at the time of Stephen Alison's arrest. He remembered the pretty little girl and the pale-faced lady, and he glanced sympathetically at the distorted features of the unhappy man who, with all his

sins upon his soul, had gone to take his trial at the Great Assizes.

Sergeant Gannett, who had no sentiment, had in the meantime brought the candle from the wash-hand-stand, and was holding it close to the face of the dead.

"He was going to slope, William," he said; "he'd taken off his moustache to change his appearance."

"I see," said Verity; "but, Jack, if he was going to bolt, why should he have committed suicide? It looks to me more as if he'd died in a fit. I'll go and get a doctor at once, and send word to the chief."

As soon as his comrade had quitted the room, Gannett began to make a business-like examination of the apartment. He wasn't going to touch the body or to disturb it in any way. There was no likelihood now of the prisoner escaping, and Gannett, who had many years of experience, knew that his duty was to let the doctor make his examination first. Medical men are always strong upon this point, especially in cases where the medical testimony may be important.

The moving of a body by the police or by strangers frequently destroys evidence which would have enabled a doctor to say—particularly in the case of wounds inflicted with a gun or a pistol—whether it was suicide or murder.

So Sergeant Gannett taking the candle, which had already burnt down nearly to the socket, looked carefully about the room. He noticed the lather in the soap-dish, the scissors, the razor, and the hair that the dead man had taken from his upper lip.

"It can't be very long since he did that," he said. "Why the dickens should he have stopped here all day? The body of Lord Charlton might have been discovered at any time. Probably he thought he'd managed things too cleverly for suspicion to fall on him for some time yet."

The detective looked at the candle. "That proves he hasn't been dead long," he muttered. "A dead man doesn't light a candle, and this can't have been burning more than three hours at the outside. It's odd—very odd."

He went to the little chest of drawers, and opened drawer

after drawer and made a note of the contents. There was nothing in them to connect the dead man with the crime of which Gannett felt convinced he was guilty.

Before he and Verity had left the station further details had come in, and it was known now that the Countess of Powick's jewel-case, which had been kept in the safe, had been found there rifled of its contents.

Of course, Alison had confederates. Gannett's theory, after a hurried consultation with Verity and with his chief, was that Alison had accompanied Lord Charlton home and had managed in some way to admit his accomplices, who were evidently expert burglars, to the house. There were no signs of the place having been broken into.

Sergeant Gannett didn't expect to find any of the missing jewellery in the ex-convict's room. He knew that it had probably been broken up or sent abroad for disposal that morning. But he felt sure that as soon as he could make a thorough search he would find a good deal more money in Stephen Alison's possession than he could have come by honestly.

The man wouldn't have been preparing for flight after a big jewel robbery accompanied by murder without having a share of the plunder about him.

Sergeant Gannett thought out his theory of the crime quickly and logically. His nerves were of cast-iron, and the fact that he was alone with a dead man in no way disturbed him. He had if anything a slight feeling of resentment against Alison for being dead. There would have been a considerable amount of kudos for the "active and intelligent officer" if Alison had been taken alive. The death, from whatsoever cause it arose, had discounted the arrest.

He was meditating on his bad luck when he heard a footstep on the stairs, and presently Verity, accompanied by the doctor and an inspector, entered the room.

The doctor proceeded at once to an examination of the body, and gave it as his opinion that the deceased man had died of heart disease. Appearances pointed to something of the sort, but of course it was impossible to say until a post-mortem examination had been made.

The doctor, having made his notes, left, and the

two detectives and the inspector proceeded with their task.

When Gannett found the fifty-pound note with the indorsement of Lord Charlton upon it, he held it up with a smile of satisfaction.

"That puts it beyond a doubt," he said.

Then they took from the dead man's pocket nearly forty pounds, and in the breast-pocket of his coat they found the licence entitling Stephen Alison, a convict, to be at large.

In the same pocket was a letter in an old, faded envelope. The inspector opened and read it and handed it to Verity.

It was a childish letter, written many years ago. It began "My dear Papa," and was signed, "Your loving little daughter—May."

Sergeant Verity looked at the little letter sadly and returned it to the inspector, who put it with the other papers and took charge of them.

Stephen Alison, in transferring everything in his own pockets to those of his dead brother, had in his haste and nervous excitement put May's letter with the others. Had he been calmer he would have kept that one link with the past.

When the search was concluded and everything noted, the inspector turned to his subordinates and discussed the situation.

There was no doubt now that Gannett's theory was correct, and that in at once getting on the track of Stephen Alison he had saved the murder of Lord Charlton from becoming one of the unsolved mysteries of London crime.

There was evidence that Alison, an ex-convict, had called on his old turf associate, Jack Darvell, in the assumed name of Stephens. Darvell had renewed the intimacy, for, according to Mr. Joyce, Mr. Stephens had been one of the little dinner-party entertained by his son-in-law, and had left the house on the night of the murder with Lord Charlton.

The evidence of the servants at Grosvenor Place pointed to the fact that his lordship had returned late that night and had been in the library with a guest.

That that guest was Stephen Alison, the ex-convict, the note in the dead man's possession proved conclusively.

Of course the money *might* have come into Alison's possession honestly, but it was hardly likely, unless his lordship had lost the sum to him at play or lent it to him.

And if Stephen Alison was an innocent possessor of Lord Charlton's money, why had he shaved off his moustache and evidently prepared for flight?

After discussing these points, Gannett asked the inspector what had been done about Darvell. Had any news come in?

"There is absolutely nothing to connect him with this affair yet," said the inspector; "but, acting on your information, it has been decided to keep him under observation."

"Don't you think he's in it?" asked Gannett.

The inspector shook his head. "I don't quite see where he would come in," he replied. "My theory is that Darvell took on Alison more to assist him in some gambling fraud than anything else. I think that Alison, on the night of Darvell's dinner-party, got in with Charlton, and getting into the house with him admitted his accomplices, who were burglars."

"That may be," said Verity, "and in that case I think it's most likely one of them was the murderer."

Jack Gannett shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't matter whether Alison was the actual murderer or not," he said; "he was in it."

. . . . . .

When Mr. and Mrs. Chipchase arrived home at about half-past twelve they found quite a crowd of people loitering about in front of their residence.

"O Sam!" exclaimed his good lady, "whatever's the matter? It's that Lobelia set the house afire or done something dreadful!"

Mr. Chipchase, who was not given to nervous apprehension, pooh-poohed the idea, but he was cross at having been put out of his regular habits, and the parlour of his relative having been rather a draughty one, he

declared that he had a more than usually severe attack of "rheumatiz" in the right shoulder.

"Go on," he said; "if it was fire there'd be flames, leastways we'd see some smoke. Most likely it's somebody drunk agin our railin's. But if it *is* anything happened it's on account of you draggin' me out o' my 'ouse and 'ome after a hard day's work to sit in a draughty 'ole 'cos somebody's a year older than they want to be. Come along and let's get in—I'm that bad with rheumatiz, I shouldn't wonder if I was on the club for a fortnight. I feel like it."

When the Chipchases reached the front door, Mrs. Chipchase found her fears of a tragedy more than realised.

"There's a murderer there," said a woman in the crowd; "the police have got him."

"A murderer!" cried Mrs. Chipchase. "O Sam, it's our top-floor—I always knew he was a bad lot."

Sam knocked at the door, and Lobelia, pale-faced and trembling, opened it.

Then Sam, dragging his wife after him, banged the door to in the face of the crowd, which had pressed forward to get a peep at the interior.

The constable had, on the return of Verity with the doctor and the inspector, been sent away with a message, and Lobelia had been sitting cowering in terror over the fire, and expecting every moment that she should hear a desperate fight in the passage and see the top-floor engaged in deadly combat with his captors.

The detectives had not told the girl that the lodger was dead, and she had been too frightened to venture out of the room to listen or to ask a question.

But as soon as Sam and his wife entered the house, and the inspector heard of their arrival, he came down and communicated the fact to them, and explained that he should have to lock the room upstairs and place an officer in charge until arrangements could be made for the removal of the body.

When Lobelia heard for the first time that Stephen Alison was dead, she burst out crying.

"Dead!" she sobbed, "and just as I was going out he gave me half-a-crown."

The inspector turned on her sharply. "You've been out this evening?"

"Ye-es," said Lobelia.

"How long were you out?"

Lobelia glanced uneasily at her aunt.

"Come," said the inspector, "I want to know."

"I went out about seven and—and—Oh, aunt, forgive me, I'll never do it again—I came back at half-past ten."

"Then," said the inspector, this man was alone in the house for over three hours. That's important. If any one had been here to-night to see him you wouldn't know?"

"No, sir," sobbed Lobelia; "he said he'd answer the door while I was out."

The inspector made a note of the girl's statement, which he thought might be important, and took his departure.

Then Lobelia, feeling that her sin had found her out and something dreadful *had* happened in her absence, looked imploringly at her aunt.

But Mrs. Chipchase was so overpowered by the tragedy, and the fact of her lodger's being a convict and a suspected murderer and a corpse all at the same time, that even the enormity of her niece's transgression failed to rouse her to wrath.

At one o'clock Jim Chipchase came in. The crowd had cleared away, and being full of his own information he didn't notice the preoccupied appearance of his relatives.

"Father," he said, "I heard of a murder in Grosvenor Place to-night, and I drove by and had a look at the house. I passed Mr Clement Hansell's, and the lights was all up on the first floor. It's my belief as he's there now, and I'm going to call again to-morrow, with that letter."

CHAPTER XXX

STEPHEN ALISON'S DAUGHTER

JACK DARVELL and Sampson Gaygold were closeted together. The news of Lord Charlton's murder had affected them in different ways. Gaygold, when he read the evening papers, had at first seen only the £20,000 in the pockets of himself and his associate, but a communication from Darvell had put a different complexion on matters.

Darvell's first knowledge of what had happened had been gleaned from a perusal of the evening papers which the boys and men were hawking in the streets up to a late hour.

When he got home he found Mr. Joyce in a state of great excitement and full of the murder, and Molly, who had just come in, listening to him with a white face.

"O Jack!" she exclaimed, as her husband came in, "what an awful thing it is! You've heard, of course? Poor Lord Charlton has been murdered, and the police have been here asking questions about your friend, Mr. Stephens, who left our house with him. I don't like it, Jack; it's an awful thing to be mixed up in. I——"

Jack Darvell frowned and glanced significantly at Mr. Joyce. Under the most ordinary circumstances, he objected to discussing matters of any kind before his father-in-law, and so Molly understood the frown and stopped suddenly.

Darvell had been nervous lest his wife, in her excitement, should forget his instructions and allow the name of Alison to escape her. When the Charlton dinner-party was hastily arranged, and he told her that he was inviting the gentleman they had met at the Piccadilly restaurant, she had mentioned that his name was Alison.

So for a moment or two there was silence, and Mr. Joyce, probably feeling that he wasn't wanted, saved his son-in-law the necessity of giving him a delicate hint, kissed his daughter and bade her good-night, and went

off to his own room to think things out over a long clay and a glass of hot gin and water.

When they were alone Darvell turned angrily on his wife. "What have you said to your father?"

"Nothing—I'd only just come in and he was telling me."

"You didn't say anything about Stephens not being the real name?"

"No, I was so upset at hearing of the murder, I forgot that. O Jack, you don't think this man — what was his name?—Alison, wasn't it?—had anything to do with it?"

"No, of course not, but——the police have been here, your father says—and they're coming again to see me. It's a bit awkward. I shall have to tell them who Stephens is, I suppose, or if they find out it will look bad."

There was a knock at the front door, and presently a servant entered and said the detective had called again and wished to see the master.

Darvell told his wife to go, as he was not anxious for her to assist at the interview, and then the visitor was shown in.

The interview was not reassuring. Darvell saw at once that the detective attached considerable importance to the movements of Mr. Stephens, and in the first question put to him he was at bay.

"Will you be good enough to tell me the address of the Mr. Stephens who left your house last night with Lord Charlton?"

To say he didn't know wouldn't do. The young fellows who had been at the little dinner-party would be certain to give evidence, and they would say that Stephens had been found by Darvell to accompany Lord Charlton on a sporting expedition. It would be thought very curious that he should introduce to his lordship a travelling companion of whose address he was ignorant. He couldn't very well say, "I wrote to him at Kelly's Library." After a moment's hesitation he saw that it was absolutely necessary that he should yield to the inevitable and risk an acknowledgment of the truth.

"I must explain," he said. "Stephens wasn't the

gentleman's real name—as a matter of fact, it was Stephen Alison—but as he had been connected with a Turf fraud he had adopted an alias."

"Stephen Alison," said the officer, without betraying any surprise; "then, of course, we have the address, and now I must trouble you for a little more information. The old gentleman I saw told me that you had a dinner-party. Lord Charlton and Mr. Stephens left together, but there were other guests present. Will you please give me their names and addresses?"

Darvell gave the information, and then asked for a little on his own account. He was anxious to know more about the murder.

The officer, however, was not to be drawn. He excused himself by saying that he had not yet got all the details, as he was merely making inquiries for his superior. Then he bade Mr. Darvell good night and went out.

Jack Darvell, left by himself, tried to collect his thoughts and look matters clearly in the face. He could not bring himself to believe that Alison had been such a fool as to deliberately murder Lord Charlton in his own house. He could only imagine that some quarrel must have arisen, possibly that some extraordinary circumstance had betrayed Alison's identity to the young nobleman, and that the ex-convict had, in a fit of rage, struck his victim down, and then, finding that he had killed him, had placed the body in the safe, hoping thereby to secure more time to make good his escape from England.

The fact that Alison had not called during the day, or in any way communicated with him, convinced Darvell that the ex-convict was guilty.

He made up his mind to see Gaygold in the morning. The fact that the money-lender held an assignment of an insurance policy for a large sum on the murdered man's life would naturally be speedily known to the police, and it was possible that an attempt might be made to connect this circumstance with the crime.

. . . . .

Mr. Gaygold was in possession of all the information when Darvell arrived at his office to discuss the situation.

The morning paper had given the latest details, and it was now known that the motive of the crime had been robbery—that the valuable jewels of the Countess of Powick had been stolen from the safe in which the dead body of the young nobleman had been found.

There was also a further statement which had keenly interested the partners in villainy.

"It is rumoured that at a late hour last night the police discovered an important clue, and that the murderer has committed suicide. It is extremely probable that when the inquest takes place on the body of a man found under peculiar circumstances there will be some startling revelations in connection with the Grosvenor Place tragedy."

Sampson Gaygold was furious, and was inclined to vent his wrath upon Darvell. It had been arranged that Lord Charlton's death was to take place far away, under circumstances which would make it free from suspicion of foul play, and now he had been killed in a manner which would lead to the most searching investigation. For Darvell to have entrusted the task to a man who would bungle it so terribly as this was an act of insanity.

"I don't think you need be afraid," said Darvell. "The only man who could prove anything is the last man who will speak."

"Alison himself?"

"Yes. And if it is he who has committed suicide, we are perfectly safe—dead men tell no tales."

"What makes you think it's Alison who's meant in the newspapers?"

"Because he is just the man who would make away with himself rather than be arrested on a charge of murder."

"You think he did it?"

"I did last night, but now I know that a jewel robbery was the motive of the crime I don't think he was the actual murderer. There were others in it, I'm sure. Whoever took the Powick jewels knew where they were, and Alison wouldn't. This looks like a carefully-planned burglary. But it's no good wasting time in theories. I've got to take care of myself—I am liable to be called

at the inquest, as the police know that I introduced Alison to Charlton, and that Charlton left my house with him on the night of the murder."

"But Alison may not have gone home with him. He may be alive and able to prove it. This suicide may be a totally different person."

"Well, we shall very soon know that, but my belief is that it is Alison. If he had left Charlton before the murder and was innocent of any share in it he would have communicated with me before this. It was understood that he was to write me yesterday, making an appointment to call and let me know how he had got on with Charlton, and there is nothing from him. The murder was known all over London last night—under such circumstances, if he were alive and innocent, he would have come to me at once."

"Well," exclaimed the usurer, "if he's dead that's all right, isn't it? The burglary accounts for the murder, and the fact that I hold the policy is accounted for by the fact that Charlton had given it to me as security for money advanced. The office won't make a fuss about paying, I suppose?"

Darvell shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see on what grounds they can do that with the clear evidence of the burglary," he said. "If Charlton had been killed, and there had been no motive, this claim of yours cropping up might have led to a few unpleasant inquiries; but as it is, the principal trouble is mine. I've got to make the best of having introduced a convict to a young nobleman as travelling companion. I shall pitch it strong about Alison being a gentleman who had paid the penalty of his one lapse from the path of virtue, and I shall swear that I had privately told Charlton who he was and all about him, and that Charlton had been interested in the case and had agreed to take him if he liked him, notwithstanding his past."

"That's a good idea, Darvell—that's first-class!" exclaimed Mr. Gaygold. "And after all, you're not mentioned in the assignment—it's made to me in a straightforward and legal manner, and nobody's to know that you have any interest in it—are they?"

"No," replied Darvell; "and after this morning if we

meet at all it had better not be at my place or yours. We don't know how things may turn out, and the less we are together the better. The facts that you are interested in Charlton's death to the tune of £20,000, and that I introduced him to the man who is evidently suspected by the police of his murder, might be put together if we were found to be on intimate terms."

"That's right," said Mr. Gaygold. "We can't be too cautious. It's a pity you came here at all. Don't stop; go away, and don't let me see you again. Write to me, don't telegraph. Until this business is through, and we know how things are going, we'll drop each other's acquaintance."

There was a knock at the door of the private room, and Mr. Sampson Gaygold started nervously to his feet.

"Wait here," he said to Darvell. "I'll go and see who it is. I don't want *anybody* to see you here. If it's all right I'll come back and let you out through the side door into the passage. My clerk didn't see you come in, so that's all right."

He went to the door, opened it, and stepped into the outer office, pulling the door quickly to behind him.

He was absent for a minute and then he returned, flushed and excited.

"Darvell," he whispered; "you know all about this chap Alison, because he was a pal of yours at the time he was convicted. Was he married?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a daughter?"

"Yes, I've heard him speak of her. I——"

"Do you remember her name?"

"No."

"Do you know what became of the wife and daughter after his conviction?"

"I heard they went to live with a relative somewhere in Westmorland."

"It's her, then!" exclaimed Mr. Gaygold excitedly.

"Her—who? What do you mean?"

Mr. Gaygold went to his desk and took out a little cambric handkerchief. "This business of the murder upset me so it put everything else out of my head," he exclaimed. "But there was a young lady here yester-

day and she left this. Look, here's her name in the corner."

Darvell took the handkerchief and looked at it. "May Alison!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—she's called again to-day with her uncle about a matter of business, and her uncle is a Captain Halford, of Patterdale, in Westmorland. The girl in the next room now, waiting with her uncle to see me, is Stephen Alison's daughter."

Jack Darvell uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Stephen Alison's daughter here! What does it mean? Does she know? Has she heard?"

"I know what it means, and it's nothing about the murder. It can't be, because there's nothing in the papers yet about the person suspected, you know; but it's a deuced queer coincidence. Now go! I've got to see the Captain here about a bill that he's mixed up with. I'll find a way of letting you know if anything important happens. The police are sure to hear of the insurance from the company, and they may be here at any time."

"All right," said Darvell, "but if Alison's daughter is staying in London, find out where she is. Alison's name is certain to come out in the newspapers to-day or to-morrow in connection with the murder, and then his daughter may be more useful to us than you think."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EVENING PAPER

Captain Halford had, immediately after his interview with Gaygold, gone to his son's rooms. In his alarm at the attitude of the money-lender, Cecil had completely lost his self-possession, and to him the spectacle of his father's grief and terror was painful in the extreme.

The young man had hoped and believed that the worst was over, now that his father knew of his grave error, and had undertaken to pay the money and obtain the improperly indorsed acceptance. He supposed that the

object Gaygold had in view in communicating with his father was to get the money. He never imagined that the scoundrel would seriously contend that a deliberate forgery had been committed, and would refuse the document and threaten criminal proceedings in sober earnest.

The result of his father's visit to Gaygold's office was a terrible blow to him. The Captain could not conceal from his son that he was alarmed as to the course Gaygold might take now he, Captain Halford, had, in a moment of ungovernable temper, repudiated the signature.

There was only one thing for him to do, and that was to fight the scoundrel who had fleeced his son with his own weapons, and declare that the indorsement *was* his and claim the bill.

The scene between father and son was painful in the extreme. The father's pride had been humbled to the dust, and although the Captain acquitted Cecil of any wilfully dishonest or dishonourable action, he was horrified to think that he had embarked already upon a career of extravagance and dissipation which had brought him into the clutches of such a rascal as Sampson Gaygold.

He was harassed by the idea that the bill which had been brought to his knowledge in such an unpleasant manner might be only one item in the young man's liabilities, and with tears in his eyes he implored his son to tell him everything.

Cecil hesitated. While his father's distress was so great he had not the courage to increase it by telling him that, although he had no other bill transactions, he was heavily in debt, that his yearly allowance had been eaten up by payment of his gambling debts, and that he had outstanding accounts with several West End firms who had given him credit. The sum in each case was not exceptionally large, but when he added them together mentally the total was one which, under the existing circumstances, alarmed him.

So he evaded his father's appeal and endeavoured to reassure him.

"I owe a little here and there," he said, "but I can't say what the amount is off-hand. I'll find out to-day,

and let you have a list of my debts.'" And with th Captain Halford had to be content and return to t hotel where he was staying, and at which he had l May.

But before he went he put the situation plainly. I was not a rich man, but he had behaved generou to his son, believing that the young man would stu hard, and with his natural gifts would eventually att a good position at the Bar and make a fortune himself.

His income, never large, had of late years been m terially decreased. The bulk of the property which l been left him by his father was in the West Indies, a the plantations had suffered seriously. He might h sold the property, but it would have been at an enorm sacrifice, and he had held on in the hope of bet times.

He had lived economically himself, having his si and his sister's child to support, but he had never sti Cecil, feeling that he had no right to injure his p pects because he had undertaken an outside respo bility.

The Captain had, in his anxiety to warn Cecil aga further extravagance, represented the position as m serious perhaps than he himself believed it to be. the interview with Gaygold had made him nervous depressed, and his natural tendency to see everyt working out to a disastrous termination had been creased by the anxiety and worry of the last two days.

He did not believe for a moment that Gaygold w refuse his money and carry out his threat of ruining son by bringing a criminal charge against him, but was fearful that in the light-heartedness of youth, C relieved from this anxiety, might plunge into fur extravagance.

His intention was to alarm his son, and he succee but the result he had not foreseen.

When his father left him the young man felt tha had no longer the courage to make a clean breas everything as he ought to have done.

He added up his liabilities, and looked at the tot dismay. How, after what had been said, could he ad

his father's distress by asking for a sum which was little short of a thousand pounds?

No—the Gaygold matter would be settled, and his father must pay no more for him. He would get time of his creditors and find at once some means of earning an income for himself, and then he would pay everything off by degrees.

Directly the idea had taken possession of him he sat down and wrote a letter to his father, in which he announced his intention of being no longer a burden upon him. It would be years before he could hope to make an income at the Bar, and during those years he would be in a position of dependence. He hoped that his father would forgive him. He felt that what he was about to do was his duty under the circumstances. When he had obtained employment he would communicate with his father again—until then he remained his respectful and affectionate son.

The letter written, Cecil made his preparations to leave his present apartments. He dreaded another meeting, so he decided to conceal his whereabouts for the present.

He would go into cheap lodgings and look for something to do — some place abroad or in the Colonies. There was nothing to keep him in England—no one who would want him—no one who would miss him.

Except Jenny.

The thought of leaving England brought back the young girl who had won his heart vividly to his memory.

He made up his mind before he left he would say good-bye to Jenny Verity.

. . . . . .

Sampson Gaygold, as soon as Darvell had left, invited Captain Halford and May into his private room.

The Captain, who had come prepared for an unpleasant interview, was surprised at the conciliatory tone which the usurer immediately adopted.

Gaygold commenced by apologising for any harshness he might have displayed on the previous day, but he begged that it might be overlooked as natural under the circumstances.

He had no desire to cause the Captain more pain than his son's conduct had evidently caused him, and he would give up the acceptance on payment of £200.

With a sigh of relief the Captain drew the bank-notes from his pocket, and offered them to Gaygold. But the money-lender shook his head.

"I am sorry we cannot complete the transaction at present," he said, with a smile that was meant to be reassuring, "but you need have no further anxiety. The fact is, in my temper yesterday I took the bill to my solicitor to consult him as to how far I should be justified after your statement in compromising the matter. He was not in, and so I wrote a letter explaining the situation and left it for him. This morning, on calling at his office, I found he had gone out of town for a day or two on business. He had written me a letter which I have received, but unfortunately he locked the bill up in his private safe, and no one can get at it until he returns to town."

The Captain crushed the notes nervously in his hand and put them back into his pocket.

Under ordinary circumstances, confronted by this new obstacle, he would have made an indignant remonstrance, but his spirit was broken, and he no longer dared to express a doubt of the money-lender's *bona-fides*.

"What do you mean to do?" he said helplessly. "Can't you take the money, give me a receipt for it, and send me the bill—you know my address?"

"No," replied Mr. Gaygold. "I don't think I can do that. I don't think we had better have any writing or any correspondence of any kind under the circumstances. One has to be particular in these matters, you know."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Well, you can stay a day or two longer in town. I am sure," he added, with a glance at May which caused the blood to rush to her cheeks, "Miss Alison will not mind. Ladies—especially young ladies from the country—can always find agreeable employment for a few days in London."

"Very well," replied the Captain, "I must stay. When shall I call again?"

"Well, you had better give me your address in town. Directly my solicitor returns I will get the acceptance from him and let you know. Then you can call and pay the money, and the matter will be at an end. I will not lose a moment in communicating with you as soon as the bill is once in my possession."

"I am staying at Brown's Hotel, —— Street, Portman Square," said the Captain. "If you will send to me there I will come to the office at once."

He motioned to May, and was about to leave, when an idea occurred to him. Passing his niece through into the outer office, and giving her a reassuring look, he closed the door, and, walking up to the money-lender, said, in a low voice—

"I don't know what your motive for this delay is, but if it is part of a plan to force me into yielding to some exorbitant demand which you are presently going to make, I think it right to tell you that you will be wasting your time. In the event of your taking proceedings, which I don't think likely, I shall make a statement which will fully relieve my son of any criminal responsibility in the matter. Good morning."

There was something of the old fire in Captain Halford's manner as the big blue eyes gazed unflinchingly at the cunning face of the usurer, but Mr. Gaygold's only expression was one of respectful pity.

"Ah, my dear sir, how you misunderstand me—how wilfully you misunderstand me."

The Captain shook his head. "No, sir, I don't think I do. I think I understand you only too well—and that is why I have told you what will happen if you attempt to put me to any further trouble or annoyance in the matter."

Then, without waiting for the money-lender's reply, Captain Halford opened the door and joined May, who was waiting anxiously in the outer office.

Mr. Gaygold rubbed his hands. "That's all right," he said to himself. "To-night or to-morrow the papers will be full of the name of Stephen Alison, the suspected murderer of Lord Charlton, and I've done what Darvell wants—I've found out where May Alison is staying, and I've kept her in London."

Mr. Gaygold, satisfied with his morning's work, put on his hat and went out to luncheon.

The early editions of the evening papers were out and the contents bills were displayed.

Mr. Gaygold bought a paper and turned eagerly to the head-lined accounts of the latest details concerning the Grosvenor Place mystery.

This was the first paragraph he read:—

"We have ascertained that the body of the man found by the police in a house in Exton Street last night is that of Stephen Alison, who was some years ago sentenced to penal servitude for the notorious Turf frauds. It is believed that Alison was in Lord Charlton's company on the night of the murder, and some startling evidence connected with the crime is anticipated at the inquest."

CHAPTER XXXII

AT GROSVENOR PLACE

When at nine o'clock in the morning Stephen Alison, who had not fallen asleep till early dawn, woke with a start, he stared for a moment at his strange surroundings. Then with one swift flash memory reasserted itself, and the events of the previous night surged in upon his brain.

He had entered the house in Grosvenor Place as its new tenant. He had been received by the servants, who had been bidden to expect Mr. Clement Hansell that evening, as their new master.

The new butler, who had that morning only entered upon his duties, had received his instructions from his predecessor, and hastened to inform Mr. Hansell where the heavy trunks which had been forwarded direct by the steamship company had been placed.

The baggage which had arrived from the hotel had been placed in Mr. Hansell's dressing-room.

"There are one or two things I shall want from the big trunks," said his master, "and if you'll show me the room, I'll go there at once."

The butler led the way to a large, square room in which the trunks and heavy boxes of the millionaire were conveniently placed for their proprietor to have access to them.

A fire had been lighted in the room, the butler anticipating that his master would pay it an early visit.

The butler inquired if he should send some of the servants to Mr. Hansell's assistance in unpacking the trunks, and was informed that there was no necessity. Mr. Hansell was merely going through one or two of the boxes in search of some papers which he was likely to require on the following day.

The butler retired, and Stephen Alison, left alone, took out his bunch of keys and tried the various locks until he had succeeded in fitting them all. Then, flinging the lids back, he commenced a search which lasted until an early hour of the morning.

The bulk of the things had no particular attraction for him for the moment; but in one trunk he found a large tin box containing Clement Hansell's will and other important papers and memoranda, and this, after he had glanced through the contents hurriedly, he put aside. Then he rang the bell, and told the servant who came to take the box to his bedroom.

Over the contents of that box, and the papers which he found among the luggage sent from the hotel, Stephen Alison pored until his eyelids became weary and his head heavy.

Thanks to his brother's methodical business habits, he had acquired a fair knowledge of the property he possessed, and had mastered certain facts which would enable him more easily to act the character he had assumed.

The leisurely manner in which Hansell had gone about his business after his arrival in England was all in Stephen Alison's favour. He, too, would be able to take his time without arousing suspicion, and he determined to take no single step forward without first of all making sure of the ground he was treading.

From the letters and papers, and the memorandum-book he examined in his brother's despatch-box, and clothes forwarded from the hotel, he found that he was

to expect a secretary, Mr. Dennis Avory, and that alarmed him; for he wasn't sure how much Mr. Avory knew of his employer, but he relied upon his striking similarity to his brother, and the prudence he intended to show in conversation, to carry him through.

It was ten o'clock before Stephen came down to breakfast. Marsden, the butler, had sent one of the men-servants to the room to inquire if he could be of any assistance, for as yet Mr. Hansell had not engaged a valet, but the offer had been declined.

There were a dozen letters on the breakfast-table. Most of them were circulars, only one was important. That was a letter from Mr. Hansell's London bankers. It was brief and to the point.

"SIR,—We beg to inform you that the proceeds of the sale of your property have been received by us from your agents in Johannesburg. We should be glad if you would call to give us instructions with regard to the disposal of the money, and to place your signature on our books.—Faithfully yours,

"JOHN MILLER, *Manager.*"

Here at least was one great difficulty providentially escaped. The signature upon which all cheques in the name of Clement Hansell would be honoured would be the signature which Stephen Alison placed in the books of the bank.

When he had read through the letters, Mr. Hansell had a short interview with his butler. He explained that it was his desire for the present to remain as quiet as possible, and he had no wish to receive more visitors than he could help, or to be interviewed. He desired that his privacy might be as little disturbed as possible, and the servants, therefore, were to have strict instructions to prevent, as far as possible, any one obtaining access to the house.

The butler quite understood, and assured Mr. Hansell that nothing should be wanting on his part to secure him the privacy he desired.

Mr. Marsden, encouraged by his employer's amiability towards him, and willing to instruct a gentleman who

had so recently arrived in London on local affairs, then ventured on a little remark of his own.

The *Times* and the *Morning Post* lay unopened on the breakfast-table, therefore it was possible that Mr. Hansell had not heard the latest details concerning a terrible murder which had taken place at the residence of the Earl of Powick, a few doors down. Young Lord Charlton, the son, had been killed by a blow on the head and thrust into the safe, from which her ladyship's jewels had been stolen.

Stephen Alison controlled his features with a violent effort. He had deliberately refrained from reading the papers, for he had determined as far as possible to keep his mind from dwelling upon the horror that had come so suddenly into his life.

He wanted to stop the butler at once; but he hesitated to do so. If he appeared to object to a reference to the murder it would seem strange to the man. When your almost next-door neighbour is murdered it is only natural that you should be interested in the details.

So he let the butler talk on, and listened nervously, wondering every moment what he should hear.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Marsden, "it's an awful tragedy, and everybody's talking of it. I see in this morning's paper that the police think they've got a clue. Some man has committed suicide in a street near Euston Square, and it's thought as he'll be brought into the murder at the inquest."

"Oh," said Mr. Hansell, "and who is this man—does it say?"

"No, sir—it's only a little bit in the morning papers—but it's quite a sensation. There's lots of people standing outside and looking up at the house now. If what the morning papers say is right, there'll be some startling revelations before long."

"Ah," said Mr. Hansell, "I shall read all about it. It's very shocking—very shocking indeed. You say that jewellery was stolen from the safe?"

"Yes, sir—of course that must have been the motive of the crime."

"Yes," said Mr. Hansell, "that must have been it."

"But from what I've heard from the butler there, who

is a friend of mine, the mystery is how the burglars got in, unless it was the man that his lordship brought home with him and had in the library smoking and drinking with him, which is a curious thing to believe he'd do, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes; but it doesn't follow that this person was the murderer, so far as I understand the case from you. The burglars might have broken in later in the night."

"No, sir—there's not a sign of anything of the sort. His lordship's man told me that whoever the murderer was he didn't *break* in—he must have walked in, or been let in."

There was a knock at the door and a servant came in.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but there's a cabman called and wants to see you very particularly. He says he has some property of yours that you left in his cab the other evening, and he wants to see you about it."

"Some property of mine?" exclaimed Stephen Alison, alarmed, and for the moment forgetting the part he was playing. Then recovering himself he said to the butler, "You'd better go and see what it is."

Stephen Alison, when the man had quitted the room, began to feel nervous for the first time since he had made up his mind to impersonate his dead brother.

He began to realise that many things might have happened during the days that Clement Hansell was in town, of which he was entirely ignorant, and that at any moment, unless he behaved with the utmost caution, he might find himself in an awkward position.

The butler re-entered, and informed Mr. Hansell that the cabman had a letter, which he, Mr. Hansell, had left in his cab some days previously, and he was anxious to return it to him personally.

Stephen Alison thought the matter out. He could hardly, under the circumstances, refuse to see the man who evidently only wished to give up the letter to the person to whom he imagined it belonged. To send him away would be to leave a letter of Clement Hansell's in the possession of a stranger, and the contents of the letter might be very important.

But there was an element of danger in the interview.

The cabman had driven the real Clement Hansell, and he would find another man bearing that name.

The fear that came into Stephen's mind was only momentary. Cabmen are not in the habit of so closely scrutinising their fares that their features remain graven on their memory, and even if this man had taken especial notice of Clement Hansell, he would only find his double. If Stephen was going about the world as Clement Hansell he would have to face greater dangers than a London cabman, and it would be absurd to shirk this interview.

"Very well," said Mr. Hansell to the butler, who was waiting for his master's decision. "Show the man in."

A minute later the door opened, and a smartly dressed London cabman, with a flower in the buttonhole of his box-coat, entered, hat in hand.

Stephen Alison looked up and felt the room reeling round with him. The cabman who had come to return the lost letter of Clement Hansell, was the son of his landlady, James Chipchase.

. . . . . .

"I beg your pardon, sir," began "All on" Jimmy, in his softest tones, "but after I'd driven you in my cab to the City the other day I found a little dockyment as must ha' slipped out of your pocket."

James Chipchase was looking straight at him, but there was no sign of doubt or wonder on the cabman's knowing, amiable face.

Stephen recovered himself with a sigh of relief. He remembered that Chipchase had only seen him in the narrow, ill-lighted little passage late one evening, and that he had his hat on, and wore a moustache; and now he was evidently completely deceived by the resemblance of the occupant of the house to his previous fare, Mr. Clement Hansell.

"A document?" said Stephen quietly. "Well, where is it?"

"Well, sir, I hope as you won't think me presuming, but business is business; and you see I could ha' took it to the lost property office at Scotland Yard, but I don't

think as you'd care about the police a-reading of it under the circs."

The peculiar emphasis which James Chipchase placed upon the word "police," warned Stephen that he must be careful in his answers. Here was evidently some affair of his brother's of which he knew nothing, so he replied, cautiously—

"Well, my good fellow. And so, thinking I shouldn't care for this document to be read by the police, you brought it to me direct. That's very good of you. What is it?"

"Well, sir, it's a letter from a lady, and it ain't a love-letter. Now perhaps you can guess what it is."

"Oh yes—I think I do," said Stephen, who feared to confess ignorance, "and I suppose you brought it back for a reward?"

"I did have such an idea—but I hope, sir, as you don't think I'm trying to extort money or anything of that sort. But if you think I've done the right thing by bringing it straight here—well, I leave the honery-rarium to you, sir. There's the letter."

He handed the German woman's letter to Stephen, who took it and read it.

"Oh, that was it, was it?" he said. "I really don't attach much importance to it. Of course it's utterly absurd—an attempt at blackmail. But as you've been put to trouble in the matter, I'll take it that it's worth five pounds to me."

Jim Chipchase's face fell. "Well, sir, seeing as you are a millionaire and a public character so to speak, I should ha' thought that it was worth fifty to you at least to have kept this from Scotland Yard. Don't think as if you don't pay me I'm going to open my mouth and make a story and give you away—I'm a straight man, I hope, and if you say a fiver's the price, I'll take the fiver; but, honest, I think I've done you fifty pounds worth of good."

Stephen read the letter again. He believed that Clement Hansell *would* have given fifty pounds rather than have such a letter brought to the knowledge of the police, especially as he was going to reside permanently in England.

"Very well, my man," he said, "you've put the matter fairly and honestly, and although there's nothing in the letter that I have really cause to be ashamed of, I'll agree to your terms. I haven't fifty pounds about me. Call to-morrow and I'll give it you. You can keep the letter as security, if you like."

He held out the letter to the cabman, but Mr. Chipchase shook his head.

"No, sir. Your word's good enough for me and so will your cheque be, and I'll take that and save you the trouble of seeing me again."

Stephen was in a fix. He had not as yet a drawing account at the bank.

"I'd rather pay cash," he said. "Come to-morrow at eleven. You needn't see me—I'll put the notes in an envelope and give it to one of the servants to give you when you call."

"All right, sir—that's fair enough. You keep the letter and I'll keep the appointment."

Mr. James Chipchase give the millionaire his best bow, and went out well satisfied with his morning's work.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A MORNING CALL

When James Chipchase had gone, Stephen Alison rose and paced the room. The import of the threatening letter which his brother had left in a hansom cab he scarcely realised. It was some villainy committed at the Cape, he supposed, and no doubt the woman had reason for her accusation.

Stephen did not grasp the fact that, having taken the place of Clement Hansell, he himself was now the person threatened with assassination.

The one dominant idea in his mind was that the man who had just left him had come from the house in which his dead brother lay—must have been in full possession

of all that happened when the police found the body, and evidently, by the newspaper reports as narrated by the butler, jumped to the conclusion that Stephen Alison had committed suicide. He would have given anything to have led Jim Chipchase on to talk of the affair, but he dreaded to broach the subject.

A chance word might have betrayed knowledge on his part which would have astonished the cabman, and would, perhaps, have formed the subject of his comments when he returned home.

A spell of worry and nervous excitement was succeeded by a calmer mood. Stephen felt that, after all, he had passed through a severe test successfully. But the position was evidently going to be a perilous one, and it was necessary that he should above all things remain master of himself.

He knew that until the inquest on his brother had been held he should feel nervous and anxious. If that went through, and the dead man was accepted as Stephen Alison, he would have a chance. He would master his brother's affairs, and devise some plan by which his wife and daughter might benefit at once from his newly-acquired wealth—his now by actual right, as he had found the will to be as his brother had stated. He wanted to see the result of the police investigation into the murder of Lord Charlton, and then he would go abroad for a time, travel, and rest his shattered nerves, and prepare for the task that lay before him—the hunting down of the villains Darvell and Gaygold. He intended to punish his enemies and to reward his friends; but he must do it in such a manner that no living soul would ever suspect that Stephen Alison was still alive.

His death would be announced to the world at the inquest—probably before that, for the newspaper reporters were certain to discover from the Chipchases the name of their dead lodger.

When he realised that in a few hours the story of his death would be made public, a sudden thought came to him that caused the hot blood to rush to his face.

His wife would hear the news. May would learn the truth. She would know that the father she believed to

have died long ago had been a criminal, and was now suspected of having committed a dastardly and brutal murder.

He wondered whether it would not have been better to have stayed to face the charge—to have gone to the police at once and told them the story of his acquaintance with Lord Charlton.

But it was too late to go back now. The course he had taken had only made the facts against him more convincing.

There was one thing that he must do. That was to discover the real murderer of Lord Charlton, and discover it in a way which would enable him secretly and anonymously to put justice on the right track. Everything could be done with money. He had money now—a huge fortune was at his command. His wife and May would still perhaps have to mourn him as dead; but they would no longer think that he had died with the blood of a fellow-creature on his head.

At the dinner at Jack Darvell's there had been other guests who knew the young lord. They were certain to communicate with the police, and would probably be called at the inquest. Jack Darvell would have to go into the witness-box. What story would he tell to account for his introduction of a ticket-of-leave man to the young nobleman as a travelling companion?

As the possibilities of the future presented themselves to his mind, Stephen grew restless. He felt oppressed in the room—strange and ill at ease in the great house. Every time a servant came in he fancied that his manner and his agitation would excite suspicion.

He decided to go out, and then he remembered that it was necessary that he should go to the bank. When he went out he walked towards Victoria, instead of passing the house of the Earl of Powick. At Victoria he hailed a cab, and drove to the bank in the City. Giving his name to a clerk, he was ushered into the room of the manager, who received him with great politeness.

"I thought it better, Mr. Hansell," said the manager, "to have your views at once. The sum that stands to your credit is a very large one, and I presume you will only want a portion of it to go to your ordinary

account. At any rate, we shall be glad of your instructions."

"I have only been in London a short time," replied Stephen, "and I really haven't made up my mind what I am going to do. At present all I think I will do is to open a drawing account."

The manager and his client arranged that matter, and then the clerk brought in the signature-book.

"Will you kindly give us your cheque signature, Mr. Hansell?" said the manager, presenting the book and handing Stephen a pen.

Stephen Alison, before coming to the bank, had referred to his brother's papers. Among them he had found an old pass-book with several paid cheques in it. He had copied the signature once or twice easily, for it shaped itself to his own hand.

Dipping the pen in the ink he took the book and wrote—"Clement Hansell."

The clerk who was in attendance blotted it carefully, and took the book away for the paying cashiers to make themselves acquainted with the signature of the new client.

Mr. Hansell was handed a cheque-book, and the first use he made of it was to draw a cheque for £200 and cash it across the counter.

When he left the bank and came out into the busy thoroughfare the newspaper carts were just delivering early editions of the evening newspapers to the street hawkers. As the boys took their quires they spread the contents bill out, and Stephen saw that the murder of Lord Charlton was the prominent subject upon them.

He bought a paper, and opening it nervously turned to the report of the "Great Murder Mystery." The first paragraph that caught his eye, although he had anticipated it, sent a cold shiver through his frame—the dead man found in the house at Exton Street had been identified by the police as Stephen Alison, an ex-convict.

He folded the paper and thrust it into his overcoat pocket, and hailing a cab drove to Grosvenor Place.

He wanted to be between four walls again, safe from the eyes of his fellow-men. It seemed to him that with this murder in every man's mind—with his name on

every man's lips—it was tempting Providence for him to walk openly through the crowded streets. He had hardly got in before the butler came to him and informed him that a gentleman had called during his absence. He had left a card and had said that he would return later in the day.

Stephen took the card and read the name upon it. It was "Mr. Dennis Avory."

His unknown secretary had arrived. He was going to call again, and Stephen would have to see him and to converse with him.

He had passed safely through two ordeals, and there was yet another awaiting him.

What did Dennis Avory know of his brother's affairs? Would he, too, be deceived? Would Stephen's ignorance of his brother's business matters, upon all the topics upon which Avory and Clement Hansell might have conversed, lead to the quick detection of the imposture?

He went into the library, and gave orders that when Mr. Avory called again he was to be shown in.

"I'll get it over, and know the worst."

Half-an-hour later Mr. Dennis Avory was announced. Stephen rose, and stood with his back to the light, and waited for his visitor.

Dennis Avory entered. He was evidently in a state of great agitation.

"Mr. Hansell," he said, then he paused. "I beg your pardon," he stammered—"I didn't recognise you for a moment—Ah, I see what it is—you've taken off your moustache."

"Yes," replied Stephen uneasily, relieved that the young man had accounted for the change himself. "Does it make much difference?"

"No—not so very much, perhaps—but then I can hardly judge; I only saw you once, remember, in your office in Johannesburg."

"Yes, of course. Well, and when do you propose to enter on your duties? I haven't very much correspondence yet."

"If you don't want me for a day or two I shall be glad, Mr. Hansell," said the young man eagerly, "The fact is, I'm very anxious about some friends of mine."

"Indeed—nothing bad, I hope?"

"I don't know what to think. I'm interested in a young lady. She left home suddenly with her uncle a few days ago, and I am convinced from what I have learned since it was in consequence of some trouble. To-day I bought a newspaper to read about this terrible murder, and I have just seen a name mentioned in connection—of course, the similarity is a coincidence, but it has rather upset me."

"What is the name you have seen?"

"Stephen Alison."

"And the young lady?" gasped Clement Hansell, "the young lady about whom you are troubled?"

"Is the niece of Captain Halford, of Patterdale. Her name is May Alison."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE NEW SECRETARY

At the inquest held on the body of Lord Charlton the principal witness was Mr. Jack Darvell. The statement he had made to the police authorities he repeated before the coroner. He had known Stephen Alison in the days of his prosperity, and had been on terms of friendship with him when he was arrested for the offence of which he was afterwards found guilty and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. Soon after Alison's liberation on a ticket-of-leave Darvell had accidentally met him at a West End restaurant. Alison had appealed earnestly for help, and had assured Darvell that unless he could speedily find the means of earning an honest living he would commit suicide.

Darvell was sorry for his old friend and associate, and promised to help him if he possibly could. He, Darvell, knew that Lord Charlton was anxious to find some one to accompany him on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains. He was willing to pay the expenses of a suitable person. Darvell told Lord Charlton Alison's story, and

said to him, "Here is the very man for you, if you are willing to overlook the one grave error he has made. Will you see him and judge for yourself if he is the sort of person you would care to help out of a terrible position?"

Lord Charlton had consented to meet Alison, and the meeting had taken place at the little dinner-party at Darvell's house. It was at Lord Charlton's suggestion that Alison was introduced under a false name. "If I am to take him with me," said his lordship, "he'll have to get rid of the name of Stephen Alison for a bit—I can't tell everybody I'm going about with an ex-convict."

The introduction took place, and Lord Charlton expressed himself as perfectly satisfied. The two men, Lord Charlton and Stephen Alison, left the house together, apparently upon the most friendly terms, and that was the last Darvell saw of either of them.

In reply to a question, Mr. Darvell stated that he had seen the body of the man found dead in Exton Street, and he had identified it as that of the man whom he introduced to Lord Charlton, Stephen Alison, *alias* "Mr. Stephens." In answer to the coroner, he said that it was understood, when Lord Charlton left after the dinner-party, that Stephens was going to accompany him to his house. The money found on the body of Stephen Alison might have been given him then by his lordship. Alison was without means, and his lordship quite understood he would have to provide him with funds for his outfit.

The evidence of the police repeated the facts already known. It was evident from their statements that their theory was that Lord Charlton had been murdered by the person or persons who abstracted the Countess of Powick's jewels from the safe. The police had also identified the body found at Exton Street as that of Stephen Alison, upon whom an inquest was to be held on the following day. The bank-note found in the dead man's possession was proved by the valet to have been in the house on the night that the murder took place. The general evidence tended strongly to support the theory that more than one person had been concerned in

the robbery which had brought about Lord Charlton's death, and the jury eventually found that Lord Charlton had been wilfully murdered, but by whom there was at present no evidence to prove.

Stephen Alison read the report of the inquest in the evening papers, and saw at once that Darvell, in making the statements he had, had been actuated by a desire to shield himself from the suspicion of having introduced to Lord Charlton the man who had murdered him. If the police were convinced that the ex-convict was the murderer, the revelation that a money-lender was to benefit to the extent of £20,000 by Lord Charlton's death might cause searching inquiries to be made as to the business relationship of Messrs. Darvell and Gaygold.

Stephen had willingly allowed Dennis Avory to postpone for a day or two the assumption of his secretarial duties. The discovery that Avory knew and was interested in his wife and daughter had come as a thunderclap, and the young man's presence embarrassed him. But now he wanted some one with whom he could discuss the evidence given at the Charlton inquest, He wanted to learn how other people looked at the matter.

But he was glad that no one was with him the following evening when he read the inquest on the body of the man found at Exton Street.

To his horror he discovered that his wife had been telegraphed for by the police to come and identify him, but the shock of hearing of her husband's death under such sensational circumstances had been too much for her. She had travelled to London, but had been too ill to see the body or to appear in court.

Under the circumstances the evidence of her brother, Captain Halford, had been accepted. But Captain Halford had hesitated to swear to the dead man. He explained that it was several years since he saw his brother-in-law, and that previous to his conviction he had always worn a beard and moustache. The face of the corpse was clean-shaven, and so the Captain could not positively swear that he recognised the features of Stephen Alison.

Sergeants Verity and Gannett, however, settled this point. They knew Stephen Alison well, and they ex-

plained that the convict, who had grown his moustache since his release, had shaved it off on the evening of his death. There was evidence of the fact in the room, The clothing and the articles found on the dead man were then produced in court, and the coroner read aloud to the jury the letter found on the body from the convict's daughter, May. The "licence" was also produced, and at the conclusion of the evidence the jury had no hesitation in finding that the dead man was Stephen Alison, or in accepting the medical testimony that the cause of death was a sudden failure of the heart's action, probably brought on by intense excitement.

Stephen Alison read the newspaper report to the end, and put the paper aside with a groan of despair.

The names of his wife and daughter had already been dragged into the case. Not only was the story of his previous offence blazoned anew to the world, but the shadow of a greater crime still now darkened for ever the pathway of his loved ones.

And he was powerless to dispel those shadows. With all the vast wealth at his command he could do nothing. For a moment the idea that he could still go to the police and say, "I am Stephen Alison—I went with Lord Charlton to save him, not to kill him — I am innocent of any share in his murder," took possession of him.

But on reflection he saw that that would not help his wife and daughter. It was better after all that they should think him dead. The awful thing was that everything pointed to the fact of his having been an accomplice in a cruel and dastardly murder.

There was but one thing for him to do now—to devote himself to the discovery of the real assassin. The only possible proof of his innocence which the world would accept would be the discovery of the guilty.

. . . . . .

When Dennis Avory came to Grosvenor Place to commence his duties, he found them of the lightest possible description.

Mr. Clement Hansell handed him a number of letters to reply to, but they were of the ordinary kind, being

principally appeals for help for charitable societies and impecunious individuals.

But his employer was sympathetic, and questioned him eagerly as to the private trouble which he had explained at the first interview.

The young man, who had vainly striven to conceal the grief from which he was evidently suffering, was glad of some one to whom he could tell his trouble.

"You have seen by the papers, Mr. Hansell," he said, "that my worst fears have been confirmed. The Miss Alison in whom I am interested is the daughter of the Stephen Alison who is mixed up in this terrible murder."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the millionaire. "Have you seen the family since you arrived in London?"

"I have seen Captain Halford. Mrs. Alison, poor lady, is lying ill at the hotel, and May is nursing her mother. The Captain has another trouble, unfortunately. His only son has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Some money difficulty, from what I could gather," said Avory. "The Captain showed me a letter of farewell. His son is going away to seek employment, he says; but I fear it is because he will be pressed by his creditors."

"And the young lady—did she—does she know—has she heard of her father's death?"

"Yes, poor girl! Her uncle tried to keep it from her. But she picked up a paper in the reading-room at the hotel—she saw her own letter—the letter which she had written to her father! Oh, it is too terrible!"

"It is terrible!" cried the millionaire.

He sat for a moment, lost in thought. Then turning to the young man, and gazing earnestly in his face, he said—

"Will you forgive me if I ask you a question, Mr. Avory? Were you engaged to this young lady?"

"No, sir—I have only known her for a short time—but I know now that I had grown to love her, and the hope was in my heart one day to make her my wife."

"And now?"

Dennis Avory heaved a deep sigh. He answered his employer's question indirectly as he groaned aloud in his anguish, "A murderer's daughter! Oh, it is too cruel—too horrible! I can't believe it!"

Mr. Hansell sat lost in thought for some time before he spoke again.

"I have been thinking," he said, "if I cannot be of some slight service to the unfortunate family. The son, for instance—his father may be able to find him. If he can, and the young man will come to me, I may be able to do something for him."

"Ah, if you would," exclaimed Dennis, "I am sure it would be a great relief to the Captain, who is overwhelmed with grief just now."

"Well, I leave it to you. Find the young fellow and bring him to me. Now you had better get through your correspondence."

Stephen Alison saw his first chance of beginning to repay the debt he owed the man who had saved his wife and daughter when he had brought ruin upon them. He had no fear of Cecil recognising him. Cecil was a schoolboy when they met for the last time, seven years previously, and there had been a great change in the appearance of Stephen Alison since those days.

. . . . . .

Dennis Avory gathered up the letters his employer had given him, and took them to the room which had been set apart for him. But the words that he had uttered rang in Stephen Alison's ears—"A murderer's daughter!"

That would be the world's verdict. Stephen Alison, who had some of Lord Charlton's property about him, was preparing for flight when he was struck down by the visitation of God. The police theory and the newspaper theory was that he was the assassin. He had induced Darvell to introduce him to Lord Charlton, and under the pretence of being willing to accompany the young nobleman abroad, he had obtained access to the house, and had then put into execution a scheme of robbery which he had doubtless planned with some of

his old associates—professional burglars whose acquaintance he had made at Portland.

The last suggestion he had read in a newspaper article. He repeated the word "Portland," and the thought that came suddenly to him caused him to utter a hoarse cry of excitement.

He was no longer in Grosvenor Place. He was standing at the corner of Piccadilly Circus, hungry and penniless, suicide the one idea that presented itself to him as a relief from the misery he was enduring. Suddenly a man touched him on the shoulder, and he recognised him at once. It was an old gaol-bird who had worked by his side in the quarries at Portland.

He could see the face now—he could hear the gruff voice whispering in his ear—he could remember the very words the ruffian used:—

"I've got a big job comin' on, and you're just the chap as me and my mate, Joe Huggett, have been looking for. It's easy work—you won't have to soil your hands—only look a toff and see a gent home to his front door, and help him to put his latch-key in. Oh, it's a pretty job, I tell you—all thought out beautiful—and there'll be the finest lot of swag to cut up that's been copped for many a day."

Stephen Alison sprang to his feet, and brought his fist down upon the table.

"The Duke," he cried; "it was the Duke!"

CHAPTER XXXV

AT THE VERITYS'

THE sergeant had looked in to inquire after the health of his brother, who had been kept at home by a bad cold caught on a damp racecourse while in the exercise of his professional duties.

Tom was getting better, but his wife had persuaded him to remain at home for a day or two longer.

Tom, when he saw his brother, began to question him

eagerly about the Grosvenor Place tragedy. The street musician had taken an intense interest in the case ever since he had discovered by the newspaper reports that the dead convict, Stephen Alison, whose name had been mixed up in the case, was the brother-in-law of Captain Halford.

He recalled vividly his strange meeting with the Captain and his beautiful niece in the wood at Patterdale, when the poor old gentleman was so full of dire forebodings.

"Poor gentleman!" said Tom to his wife, with a sympathetic sigh. "He imagined all sorts of horrors for himself, but he never had an idea of anything of this sort."

"Ah, Tom," said Mrs. Verity, "it's hard for him, of course, but what I think of is the wife and daughter—that sweet young lady as you talked about so often, and as your brother thinks so much of."

There was the sound of a piano being played in Jenny's own little room.

"Hark!" said Mrs. Verity. "It's always the same music with our Jenny now—it gives me the dolefuls. I do wish she would play something lively, but I suppose that wouldn't be Royal Academy."

Tom shook his head. "It ain't the Royal Academy as makes the music sad, my dear—I'm afraid it's our Jenny herself. She's something on her mind, I'm sure, and it worries me. Can't you get her to confide in you?"

"I've tried, Tom, but she won't tell me anything. She hasn't never been quite the same since the illness as you took her away to try and cure. But the doctor says there's nothing much the matter with her. I suppose it's the studying and——"

There was a knock at the door. "That's William's knock," said Mrs. Verity, and she went to the front door.

"Holloa," Tom, said the sergeant; "glad to see you up and about again."

"Oh, I'm all right now, William, but I'm glad you've come in. Me and the missus was just talking about your case and the Alisons. Anything fresh?"

"Well, we're just about where we were. Jack Gannett's got his ideas and I've got mine about Steve Alison."

"You still believe he's innocent, uncle?" said Jenny, who had come into the room unnoticed.

"Yes, my dear," said the sergeant, rising and kissing his niece affectionately, and looking earnestly at her pale face. "Yes, my dear, though Gannett's got all the arguments so to speak on his side. You see, Tom," he added, turning to the musician, "what's against my view is this. Steve Alison and the Duke—the burglar you've heard me speak of—have been together. I saw 'em myself. And both Gannett and me are pretty sure that the Duke had a hand in this job. Then we have our own ideas at the Yard about this Mr. Darvell that introduced Alison to Lord Charlton. Gannett's fitted things together pretty neatly, I can tell you. His idea is that Alison got Darvell to put him on to Lord Charlton with the idea of some big swindle that Alison was working at the time, and the Duke, who'd somehow got a false key of the safe, was watching a chance to break into the place—that night as Lord Charlton took Alison home the Duke was waiting about, and somehow got the tip that here was a chance of bringing the job off. There was no breaking in—we're sure of that—so Gannett believes that Alison let the Duke in, and the two of 'em did the job."

"But he wasn't the sort of man to work with housebreakers, according to you, William?"

"No—and I don't believe it now—in spite of things looking so dead against him. There's one or two things in his favour, too. It's quite possible Darvell's story may be true, and he told Lord Charlton who he was, and Charlton gave him the chance he wanted to lead a new life. The two notes might have been given him by his lordship. If he'd stolen 'em and been in the murder and the burglary, he would have got rid of 'em without going to the Bank of England. If he'd risked that, he'd ha' made it one risk and *changed both notes.* He only changed one—the other was found on him. If he'd been in the murder, would he have kept such palpable evidence about him?"

"You wouldn't think so," said Tom; "but he must have been at the house that night, or he couldn't ha' had the notes at all."

"He *was* there—we've proved that beyond a doubt—and it may be as that would account for his sudden death."

Tom Verity looked at his brother. He couldn't see the connection of ideas.

"Look at it this way," continued the sergeant. "An ex-convict, always a person under suspicion, goes to a house late at night and receives bank-notes. The next night he hears the boys in the street shouting 'Awful murder.' He buys a paper and finds that the man he'd been with, the man whose indorsed note he has changed, has been murdered. If that man had heart disease a shock like that might kill him."

"But, supposing him to be innocent, you don't know that he had heard of the murder?"

"Yes, the evening paper with the report of the murder was lying on the floor of the dead man's room."

"And this chap you call the Duke," said Tom, after a pause; "if you suspect him of being in it, aren't you going to arrest him?"

"He's under observation, but he's clever, and he won't give us much of a chance. He's married to a decent sort of woman who runs a little laundry at Hornsey, and the Duke's leading quite a respectable life—takes the washing home in a cart. He doesn't drink much, and if he made a good thing of this job you can trust him not to throw money about and show he's in funds. He's too clever for that."

"And none of the property's been heard of?"

"No—it's probably broken up by this time and the stones sent abroad. The only thing we've got is the watch you read about—we've traced that. It was picked up in the street by the man who pawned it at eight o'clock in the morning. The man has come forward. He found the watch lying in the muddy roadway on Westminster Bridge. It must have been dropped by the thieves who were making their way across the river with their plunder."

Jenny, who had been listening with breathless attention

to the sergeant's narrative, came nearer to him, and pu her arms round his neck as he finished.

"Uncle," she said, "if you think the man was innocen you will try all you can to prove it, won't you? Think o the shame and suffering this terrible charge against hir means to his family!"

"Yes, Jenny," replied the sergeant And as he note the eager expression in his niece's face he remembere the evening when she had been taken suddenly faint an risen from the table. It was about the Halfords and th Alisons he was talking then.

. . . . . .

When Jenny Verity left home to go to the Academ that afternoon, she noticed a young man standing at th top of the street.

She knew him in a moment, and the hot blood rushe to her cheeks.

Cecil Halford, white-faced and haggard, came toward her.

"Miss Verity—Jenny!" he said, "I've broken my promise, but I couldn't leave England without sayin good-bye."

"I'm so sorry—I understand!" gasped Jenny, hardly knowing what to say.

"You've heard—you've read?" he said.

The girl bent her head. "Yes."

"Ah, it's terrible! I was in trouble enough before I learnt the shameful truth," stammered the young man, "and I was going away to get a berth abroad. I—I've given up all idea of the Bar now; but this terrible affair has made my task, I'm afraid, more difficult than ever. The whole world knows the name of Halford to-day. My father's evidence at the inquest has told everybody that this Stephen Alison is my uncle."

"I am so sorry for you. I have thought about you often—since—since I heard the news."

"It's awful for my aunt and my cousin," he said, "and my father's quite broken down. I was going away without seeing him again, but I can't add that to his troubles. I shall see him this evening and say good-bye,

and try and make him understand that what I am doing is for the best."

"Yes—you must do that," said Jenny.

"And then I shall go away abroad—to Australia—to South Africa—anywhere. You aren't angry with me that I've come to say good-bye?"

"No—I'm—I'm sorry for you."

The young man saw the eyes of the girl he loved grow moist, and he took her hand gently in his.

"Jenny, what I'm going to say now isn't brave or kind of me, perhaps, but now that it's all over and this disgrace has come upon my people and my name, I want you to know that I loved you—that if things had been different I would have come to your father as you told me I must if I wanted to see you again."

"Cecil!"

She looked up into his face, and he understood the pained look that was there.

"I won't speak of it again," he said; "but I wanted you to know. Good-bye! God bless you, Jenny. Don't quite forget me."

"Mr. Halford—Cecil—I know all you must suffer—all your people must be suffering now. But try to think that there is hope—that, terrible as all this is, it may not be so bad as you think. I don't believe that Stephen Alison was guilty."

Cecil started.

"Ah, you don't understand," she continued, speaking rapidly. "The Sergeant Verity who has the case in hand is my uncle. I have seen him to-day—he doesn't think that Mr. Alison was guilty. He believes that he can prove that he was not. He has promised me that he will do everything in his power to clear his memory for—for the sake of—of your people, Cecil. Go back to them and tell them that—it will be one ray of comfort to them in their trouble."

A gleam of hope came into the young man's eyes.

"If that could be proved," he said, "it would lighten their sorrow—it would lift some portion of the shame from them. I'll tell them, Jenny, and God bless you for giving me the message of hope!"

"And you—you must go away?"

"Yes, it is better—for a time at least. I want to earn money. My father is not so well off as I thought he was—I want to make my own way in the world, Jenny."

"Where shall you go?"

"Where I can. Wherever it is, you shall hear from me, if you'll let me write to you—will you?"

"Yes."

Cecil Halford held out his hand and the girl took it, and with a final hand-clasp they parted. Jenny, her eyes wet with tears, went mournfully on her way, and Cecil stood looking after her for a moment or two.

"She loves me—she loves me," he said softly to himself. Then gulping down something that was very like a sob he stepped out and walked sharply in the direction of the hotel where his father and May were still staying, waiting until Mrs. Alison was well enough to be moved.

When he reached the hotel he inquired for Captain Halford, and went straight to his father's room.

There was a gentleman there, but the Captain rose with a cry of glad surprise and ran eagerly towards his son.

"Ah, Cecil," he said, "I thought you would not go away like that! Your letter almost broke my heart. It is better that you should go—now it is the best thing," he said sadly; "but it was cruel to make me think you would not even come to say good-bye."

"I didn't know—about—about—what has happened, when I wrote that letter, father."

He glanced uneasily at the visitor, a good-looking young man with a thoughtful face.

The Captain followed his look, and apologised to the visitor for not introducing his son—the joy of seeing him had made him forget that there was any one else in the room.

"This is Mr. Dennis Avory, Cecil," he said.

Dennis held out his hand. "Mr. Halford," he said, "I am fortunate in meeting you. It was to see you I called on your father."

"To see me?" exclaimed Cecil nervously, as he re-

membered that all his creditors would have seen his father's name in connection with the inquest on Stephen Alison.

"Yes. Your father told me yesterday of your letter —of your determination to give up studying for the Bar and find some position which would enable you to make an income for yourself at once. I am secretary to a gentleman who has been a most successful business man. I mentioned you to him, and he told me that he would be glad to assist you to what you want."

"You are very good," stammered Cecil, who had not heard of Dennis Avory before, and did not understand why he should interest himself on his behalf.

"I was very pleased to have the opportunity," said Avory. "May I say that you will see the gentleman?"

"Certainly," said Cecil. "I can't thank you enough for giving me the opportunity."

"Well," said Dennis Avory, "I'll make the appointment for to-morrow morning at eleven"

Dennis Avory took out a card and, writing beneath it, handed it to Cecil. "This is the address," he said—"Mr. Clement Hansell, No. — Grosvenor Place."

Cecil Halford's face brightened as he thought that his chance had come so soon, but suddenly his expression changed.

Looking nervously at Dennis Avory, he asked if Mr. Hansell knew of the connection of the Halfords with Stephen Alison.

"Yes," replied the millionaire's secretary; "he does know. You need have no hesitation on that score."

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN "INTERVIEW"

THE mystery of the Charlton murder and the supposed connection of the Chipchases' lodger with the crime had been eagerly seized upon by the criminal investigators of the London Press, and for a time there had been quite a

rush of smart young journalists to the little house in Exton Street.

Mrs. Chipchase had from the first resented this intrusion on her domestic privacy. Her worst suspicions with regard to her lodger had been confirmed, and she managed by a process of feminine logic to convince herself that her residence would henceforth be looked upon as a thieves' lodging-house, and this shameful stigma had been brought upon it by her husband, who ought to have known better than to have let his top floor to a nameless nobody with no luggage.

Poor old Sam Chipchase listened to his wife's arguments, and, in his own language, let her have her head. He knew by long experience that it was no good arguing with her or contradicting her. If he had reminded her that he wasn't even on the premises when she let the top floor to Stephen Alison, it wouldn't have made the slightest difference to her views.

So he listened meekly, and if he groaned occasionally it was from sheer force of habit. If the groans were a little more frequent than usual it was because the weather was raw and damp, and in raw, damp weather Sam was always more keenly alive to the presence of rheumatic aches and pains.

The rush of newspaper reporters had added fuel to the fire of Mrs. Chipchase's wrath. The first caller had succeeded in interviewing her before she had any suspicion of what was happening. When Jim showed her the evening paper in which an ingenious young gentleman had made three-quarters of a column of interesting narrative out of the few curt replies Mrs. Chipchase had given him, the good lady's indignation knew no bounds.

She declared that the interview was a pack of lies, and announced her intention of giving the fellow a bit of her mind if he showed his face there again.

Sam Chipchase smoked his pipe in aggravating silence while his wife was denouncing the Press and all its works.

This strict neutrality on his part caused the lady to transfer her abuse from the newspaper man to Sam.

"And you sit there," she exclaimed, "and take no more notice than if I was a lump o' stone. A nice thing indeed if a respectable woman's to be dragged out of her home and put in the papers with murderers and convicts! What's England coming to, I should like to know, with a pack of newspapers poking their noses into people's parlours and kitchens? I suppose if I'd ha' let him he'd a opened the dresser drawer and a counted the knives and forks. If he'd a looked in the cupboard he might a put it in the paper that one of the teacups is cracked!"

After Mrs. Chipchase had discovered the perfidy of the first interviewer the others had a bad time. If a knock came at the front door she became instantly aggressive.

"Lobelia," she cried, "if that's a newspaper fellow, tell him to be off."

Lobelia obeyed her aunt's instructions, but though the reporters found the landlady entirely out of sympathy with modern newspaper enterprise, they were not to be balked.

One of them working the district to try and discover if any of the neighbours knew anything of Mrs. Chipchase's lodger came upon Lobelia, as that young lady, swinging the latch-key on her finger, was doing a little morning marketing, and promptly interviewed her.

It was a novel and a delightful sensation to Lobelia, and in reply to the questions of the insinuating young journalist, she retailed her reminiscences of the top-floor in language borrowed from the pages of her favourite fiction.

The young fellow had a note-book, and every now and then made a memorandum in it.

When Lobelia went into a shop he didn't leave her, but stood outside and made a rough sketch until Lobelia came out again. Then he continued the interrupted conversation, and talked to her so long that when she got back home Mrs. Chipchase was standing at the front door in a temper, and called her a good-for-nothing hussy before a grimy and grinning youth from Simmons', the green-grocer's, who was delivering a sack of coals next door.

But Lobelia had her revenge the next day. In one swift bound she leapt into the position of a local celebrity. There in an evening newspaper was a long interview, and the portrait of a young lady concerning whose identity all doubts were removed when the neighbours found that the artist had labelled it "Miss Lobelia Cutts."

When Lobelia heard of it she rushed into the nearest stationer's shop, purchased a copy, ran home, and went up into her bedroom and read the interview with flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes.

The mean little room with its bare boards, its rickety washstand with the chipped basin, its bare walls covered with three different patterns of cheap paper, and its solitary picture—a torn Christmas coloured supplement of the *Girls of Great Britain*—faded away in the mist, and Lobelia was in the sunny boudoir of a fashionable authoress. She was seated at a table covered with flowers (she had seen a picture of an authoress at home in a society magazine displayed open in the newspaper shop-window), writing the next instalment of a thrilling serial for which the world outside was waiting with breathless impatience.

She read and re-read the interview, in which she was described as an intelligent young lady, with dark brown eyes and prepossessing features, and she felt that her hour had arrived. The scorn and contumely of years had vanished for ever. The whole of England was at that moment reading her thrilling description of the evening-dress convict, the supposed murderer of Lord Charlton.

There was just one bitter drop in her cup of joy. Her portrait was not exactly what she could have desired. In the process of reproduction sad havoc had been played with her nose, and there was a black smudge on her left cheek which might suggest to the British public that she was not in the habit of washing her face before being interviewed.

Her day-dream of fame was rudely interrupted by her aunt shouting her name up the staircase in anything but amiable tones.

For a moment Lobelia hesitated to obey. Was she,

the famous authoress of "The Convict in Evening Dress; or, Stephen Alison as I Knew Him"—was she, the celebrity of the day, whose portrait was now being eagerly gazed upon by the million eyes of the mighty Metropolis, to be thus rudely summoned to perform a menial task?

But a repetition of the summons in a still more angry tone prevented any further hesitation, and Lobelia, folding the evening paper carefully and putting it in the bosom of her dress, sailed majestically downstairs; and a few minutes later, the famous authoress was on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor of the back kitchen under the supervision of her aunt, who had an eagle eye for "corners" and all the Dutch housewife's love of pail and flannel.

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The star of Lobelia Cutts was in the ascendant for a day or two. There was an eagerness among the neighbours to wish her good morning and to engage in conversation with her, that had never been displayed before.

When she went to the greengrocer's to purchase a cabbage the attitude of 'Liza Simmons was almost respectful. Since the memorable evening at the music-hall these two young ladies had been decidedly frigid towards each other. Miss Simmons broke the ice. She had seen Lobelia's interview and portrait, and that very evening had referred to Miss Cutts, in conversation with some neighbours, as "My friend, Lobelia." On the present occasion she picked out Lobelia's cabbage with the greatest care, and made such friendly advances that Lobelia held out the hand of friendship, and said that she would let bygones be bygones.

When she was taking her departure, cabbage in hand, Miss Simmons called her back and presented her with an apple, and, quite as an after-thought, suggested that if any of them newspapers got talking to Lobelia again, she might just say that on the night she returned and let the police in to arrest the convict, she had been to the music-hall with her friend, Miss Simmons.

"I'll see about it, 'Liza," said Lobelia, nodding con-

descendingly. Then she walked up Exton Street with the air of one who had the power of the Press at her command.

Mrs. Chipchase was furious with Lobelia when she heard of the interview and saw the portrait. But of that Lobelia took little heed. Her aunt's portrait hadn't been published and hers had. Lobelia lived in the clouds for a day or two, and then she fell to earth with a crash.

On the Sunday afternoon she went out for a walk. When she came home and went into the little parlour she found a strange young woman sitting on the sofa, and Jim sitting beside her.

As the truth dawned upon the girl she gasped for breath. Jim laughed as Lobelia came in, and introduced the young woman to her as his intended.

The intended was a pretty, fair girl, with blue eyes and pink cheeks, and she rose and put out her hand and greeted Lobelia politely.

Lobelia took the hand and shook it flabbily, and then walking out of the room ran upstairs, and sitting down on the bed, burst into tears.

But she didn't cry long. Tea would be ready directly, and she wasn't going to sit down and let that stranger "think things." So she took out her little piece of looking-glass, removed the traces of her tears, brushed her hair, and went downstairs, determined to endure her martyrdom bravely.

There was a little awkwardness at the tea-table at first. Neither Sam nor his wife had seen Jim's young lady before, and the young lady herself was nervous, feeling that she was being scrutinised.

The first introduction to the family circle of the young man who is courting her is generally a trying time for the girl. Miss Jones quite realised the position, and was not at her best, in spite of Jim's gallant efforts to put her at her ease.

Lobelia assumed an attitude which is generally described as one of "icy reserve," and Mrs. Chipchase was annoyed because Miss Jones had taken a chair at the tea-table which left a darned hole in the tablecloth right under her eyes. If Jim had sat there he could have covered it with his plate.

The restraint became painful at last, and Jim, feeling that it was making his sweetheart uncomfortable, tried to start the conversation himself, and told his father and mother what he thought of doing with the fifty pounds he had received from Mr. Clement Hansell for the letter.

But he had forgotten, in his haste "to make things a bit livelier," that they had carefully avoided telling his mother the facts before.

Mrs. Chipchase bridled up. She didn't like underhand ways. Why had Jim and his father made so much mystery about it? To ease matters Jim told the whole story now, and explained that being a private letter he didn't want to talk about it more than he could help.

Mrs. Chipchase allowed herself to be mollified, and asked what this Mr. Clement Hansell was like.

"Well," said Jim, "I ain't good at descriptions, but he's a sort of a—well, something the same sort of looking man as our top-floor was. I only saw Alison once in the hall, at night, but from what I can remember of him this Mr. Clement Hansell's rather like him, except he hadn't got a moustache."

"No more had Mr. Alison, Jim," said Lobelia, seeing a chance of leading up to her "interview," which she thought might impress Miss Jones with a sense of her (Lobelia's) importance, "when they found him dead that night, but he must have taken it off after I went out."

"Yes, some time after, from what I heard at the Rose and Crown when I went in at dinner-time to-day," said Jim. "The barmaid told me that the police, as has this job in hand, had been in there makin' inquiries, and it seems a man who answered our lodger's description exactly came in late in the evenin', as the police came here, and got some brandy in a hurry; and if it was our top-floor he'd got a moustache on then."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE result of the inquest and the evidence given then had convinced Darvell that the man found at Exton Street was Stephen Alison. Until he was sure that Alison was dead he had been anxious. Now that it was proved beyond all doubt he felt there was no longer any fear of the one person who knew of his plot with Gaygold confessing, either voluntarily or involuntarily; and he wrote to the money-lender asking him to settle the Halford matter. He had had a vague idea that it might be wise to keep May and her uncle in town while the fate of Stephen was uncertain. Their actions or movements might have furnished something which would have given the conspirators a clue. But now the sooner Gaygold got rid of their business the better. There was a far more important matter to be settled, and that was the sum of £20,000 which had become due to Gaygold by Lord Charlton's death.

The money-lender communicated with the Captain at his hotel, and when the Captain called he was handed his son's bill on payment of £200.

At any other time, Captain Halford, with the document safe in his pocket, would have relieved his pent-up feelings, but the terrible family trouble which had come upon him had humbled him to the dust.

Yet it was, in a sense, a relief. The threat of prosecution was withdrawn. The money-lender might have been exorbitant in his terms had he thought it wise, for the association of the Halfords with Stephen Alison would have made the Captain willing to do anything rather than their name should be dragged before the public again.

But Sampson Gaygold didn't want publicity himself at the present moment. He was particularly anxious that nothing should occur to suggest that his transaction with Lord Charlton had the elements of suspicion in it.

Cecil Halford, after his interview with his father and Dennis Avory, felt that there was a ray of hope for him.

This young man, who was the secretary of a wealthy South African speculator, had interested himself on his behalf, and the millionaire, although he knew of the Halfords' connection with a man suspected of complicity in a crime with which all England was ringing, had generously agreed to see him, and if possible do something to further his wishes.

. . . . . .

Stephen Alison, convinced that the robbery at Grosvenor Place had been the scheme the Duke proposed to him the night they met accidentally at Piccadilly Circus, began to think how it would be possible for him to furnish the police with the clue without in any way drawing attention to himself.

An unsigned letter to the authorities might have done it, but he would have had to write it himself, and although he could have disguised his handwriting, he was nervous. The police had a knack of tracing communications of this sort, and the most insignificant detail has frequently led to the speedy discovery of the authorship. Besides, there was something repugnant to him in the idea of an anonymous letter, even in a case where so much was at stake, and where the cause of justice was being served.

So far as he could gather from what he read in the papers, there was undoubtedly an idea that he had had accomplices, and that the jewels had been made away with by them.

It was quite possible that the police already suspected the Duke, but they might have some difficulty in confirming their suspicions. Had the house been broken into, an expert officer who had had many years' acquaintance with this form of crime would have studied the methods of the burglars, examined the marks of their handiwork, and would have narrowed the scope of the inquiry to certain men.

The practised burglar generally leaves indications which a detective, familiar with his style of going to work, can

recognise. Every cracksman who has been long "in the profession" gets into a style of his own, and leaves what the police call his "handwriting" behind him.

But in the Grosvenor Place case, according to the newspaper reports, no forcible entry had been made. The safe had not been broken open. The manner in which that was done might even have given a clue. But a key had been used. The burglars had arrived at the front door, which had been opened for them; they had unlocked the safe, and departed with their booty without leaving anything behind them on which the police could go.

He could not hunt the man down himself. That risk he was not prepared to run. Everything depended upon his keeping his liberty and possession of the fortune he had acquired. One false step might lead to the suspicion of the police being aroused.

He remembered that if the dead man had been mistaken for him it was on account of the perfect likeness. He was still the perfect likeness of the man who had been buried as Stephen Alison. There was only one chance, and that was if he could find some one whom he could trust with his secret—some one who would go to the police and give them the information with which he could supply them. If he could find that man, he could perhaps not only prove his own innocence, but prevent Darvell and Gaygold from reaping the reward of their villainy.

But the man—where was the man?

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From the moment Dennis Avory had reported that Cecil Halford had accepted his offer to introduce him to Clement Hansell, Stephen Alison had been nervously anxious to see his nephew, and to learn if possible from him more of the family circumstances than Avory could tell him.

It was quite a relief to him when at last the young man was ushered into his presence.

Dennis Avory introduced Cecil to the millionaire, and then, acting on previous instructions, left them together.

Stephen, who had not seen his nephew since he was

a boy, was at once favourably impressed with the young man's manner and bearing.

He felt convinced that, whatever his failings might have been, they were rather those of the head than the heart, and he set himself at once to win the young man's confidence.

Cecil on his part was grateful for the kindly and sympathetic welcome he received from the wealthy stranger, and wanted little pressing to put the correct state of affairs before this unexpected friend in need.

When he mentioned the name of Gaygold as that of the money-lender who had behaved so infamously Stephen started, but he recovered himself quickly, and begged the young man to proceed.

Cecil made a clean breast of everything, concealing nothing. When he had finished he looked anxiously at the millionaire, and added—

"Now you know exactly how I stand, you will agree with me, I think, that it was right for me to give up all idea of the Bar and look for some means of earning money at once. I can't let my father make me the allowance he has and pay my debts too."

"No," said Mr. Hansell, "especially as—as I gather from you—the Captain's income is not so large as it has been."

"I'm afraid not," said Cecil; "and, of course, my aunt and my cousin have been a great expense to him, and must remain so."

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Hansell, with a sympathy in his voice that made Cecil wonder why a stranger should display such personal interest in his family affairs; "that must be. But as you mention the name of this unfortunate man—this—Stephen——" He hesitated, as though not quite sure of the name.

"Stephen Alison."

"Yes. I've read the case, of course. Now let me ask you this. Frankly, do you believe your uncle was concerned in this shocking affair?"

Cecil hesitated.

"I did," he said, after a pause. "How could I help it? But I have some hope now that, after all, he may have been innocent."

"Why now?" exclaimed Stephen eagerly.

"I—I've heard something."

"What have you heard?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Hansell, I'm to be quite frank with you, so I must tell you a—a secret. Some time ago I made the acquaintance of a young lady. She is a relative—I didn't know it at the time—of a detective officer, Sergeant Verity."

"Yes—yes?"

"I saw her recently, and she told me that her uncle believed that Stephen Alison was innocent."

The words "Thank God!" rose to Stephen Alison's lips. With a great effort he checked them.

"He believes him innocent," said Cecil, "and he has told his niece that he means to try and prove it."

"For your sake, Mr. Halford," exclaimed the millionaire—"for the sake of the unhappy man's wife and daughter, I hope sincerely that he may!"

"He will try, I'm sure. Jenny——"

"That is the young lady?"

"Yes," said Cecil, colouring—"of course ner people are not gentlefolks, you know, but she is a lady. She is at the Academy of Music—she has a beautiful voice, and some day I believe she will be a great singer—at least, they think so."

"Ah! but now about yourself and your affairs. What is your own idea?"

"I should like to get a post somewhere abroad. Don't you think that would be best?"

"No."

"No? What would you advise me to do?"

"Go on reading for the Bar. You may be sacrificing a great career by leaving it."

"But my present position—my debts!"

"Mr. Halford," said the millionaire, "you have been frank with me—I want to be frank with you in return. I am an exceedingly wealthy man. I have made my fortune, and have come back to England to try and do some good with it. When I heard your story from Mr. Avory, for whom I have already a very sincere regard, I thought perhaps you would allow me to help you. I have more money than I know what to do with, and I have no debts—let me help you out of yours."

"But I can't take——"

"I quite understand that—but you can borrow. You did, you know," added Mr. Hansell, with a smile. "You borrowed of Mr. Gaygold."

"But he was a money-lender."

"At 150 per cent.! Well, I want to lend you money, but I don't want any interest at all, because I don't want to go into the business. Come, I'll give you a cheque for the money that will clear your liabilities off, and you shall pay me back when the briefs come rolling in."

Mr. Hansell went to his desk, took out his cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for a thousand pounds.

"There," he said, "if there are any bills you have forgotten, let me know, and I'll write another cheque. You can send me your I O U by post."

Cecil took the cheque mechanically. He was unable to speak or move for a moment. Then he gave a little sob, and grasping his benefactor's hand went silently out of the room.

"I have begun to repay," said Stephen Alison softly, as the door closed upon his nephew.

Then he touched the bell and a servant entered. "Tell Mr. Avory," he said, "that I should be glad to see him."

"Sergeant Verity believes me innocent," he said to himself, "and he will try to prove it. Well, I must help him!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE BRANDY FLASK

The police had been so far baffled in their attempts to trace the stolen jewellery of the Countess of Powick. A full description of the articles had been circulated at home and abroad. Special details had been given which might assist an expert in recognising some of the more valuable stones, and special inquiries had been made in quarters which are as well known to the police as they are to the thieves. But no clue had been obtained, and

Scotland Yard had to go through the humiliating process of being twitted with its helplessness by the young free-lances of the popular Press.

Sergeants Gannett and Verity had their ideas, but not a particle of proof to justify them in arresting any one as Stephen Alison's accomplice. Moreover, to arrest a suspected man on bare suspicion is not considered a clever move at the Criminal Investigation Department. It is showing your hand, and preventing the other side showing theirs. If you arrest the man who is guilty, and have to let him go for lack of proof, he is careful after he obtains his liberty not to make a single move that might be to your advantage. If he is innocent, you are putting justice on the wrong scent and giving the real criminal an extra chance of escape.

"Well, William," said Gannett, as he and Sergeant Verity compared notes after making their investigations in different quarters, "I don't know what you think, but the more we work the harder the nut seems to crack."

Sergeant Verity nodded his head. "You're right, Jack; but between us we ought to get somewhere there or thereabouts. Besides, we're not working on the same lines."

"No—you've got a bee in your bonnet over Stephen Alison, and you won't believe that he was in the murder and burglary—I'm as certain that he was; and there's a little bit of information come to the chief this morning that makes my case stronger than ever."

"What's that?"

"There was a life policy for £20,000 assigned to that scamp Gaygold, the money-lender. Jack Darvell has been touting for Gaygold, we know, and most likely it was he who introduced Charlton and several other swells. Of course, the policy may only cover sums already advanced, though it isn't likely, knowing what we know of Mr. Gaygold's methods and the dirty things he's been mixed up in. My idea is that the bulk of this insurance money will be 'bunce,' and that it will be found that Charlton's bills are all in the hands of others of the fraternity, who will get them paid in full."

"I know the game," replied Verity, "but I can't see why Gaygold benefiting to the extent of £20,000 makes Alison guilty of the murder."

"You won't see, you mean, William—but it's as plain as the nose on your face. Jack Darvell planted Alison on to Charlton to 'get the job done,' and Alison did a clever thing. He readied his Portland pal and brought off a double event—the murder of the man whose death meant twenty thousand, and a big haul of valuable jewellery. Darvell himself acknowledged in the box that he had introduced Alison to Charlton with a view of his lordship engaging the ex-convict as a travelling companion. The first journey that they took together made that £20,000 payable. It wasn't badly worked either. The robbery being accepted as the motive of the crime would keep the insurance business completely free from suspicion."

"That's all right as far as it goes, Jack, and if I hadn't got certain things in my head that won't be put out I should say you'd hit it. Darvell didn't introduce Alison to Charlton for nothing—there I'm with you. But I say that if Alison had been mixed up in that murder he wouldn't have waited for two days at the address registered in our books. He wouldn't have cashed that £50 openly. Come, just listen to these points and think them out."

"Go on; I'm listening."

"Well, first of all, I want you to bear in mind that we found an evening newspaper lying on the floor of Alison's room. In it was the announcement of the murder of Lord Charlton."

"Quite right."

"He must have gone out into the street to get that paper, or at least to the door."

"Certainly."

"Next, I've found the man who was yelling the murder through Exton Street that night. I described Alison to him as well as I could. He wasn't quite sure, but he thought he remembered a man something like that buying a paper, because the man came rushing out of a public-house and almost ran into him. He described the man. It was like Alison. I asked him did this man

have a moustache, and he said 'Yes'—he was sure of that.

"I went into the public-house, and found that on the evening in question, at about the time the hawker was in the street, a man answering Alison's description perfectly came into the bar. He seemed very agitated and bought some brandy, which he took away in a small flask. That man had a moustache. The barmaid who served him noticed that. When I questioned her she said that it had never occurred to her to connect him with the man whose body had been found at Exton Street—that is why she gave no information."

"Quite possible it was Alison," said Gannett quietly; "in fact, it's quite probable. He felt ill with his heart, and he went out and got some brandy."

"Good—but the newspaper lad and the barmaid, if they are right, fix this point—that Alison was out and about in the evening, that he hadn't removed his moustache to disguise himself, that he did that *after* he had bought a paper with the news of the murder of Lord Charlton in it. What that proves to me, Jack, is this—that Alison prepared for flight only *when he heard for the first time that Lord Charlton had been murdered.*"

"You're trying to prove he wasn't guilty, and yet he was going to run away."

"Yes, because he had been at Grosvenor Place that evening—that is proved beyond a doubt; because he had received money from Lord Charlton; because he had changed one of the notes, and he felt that he was sure to be suspected, and there may have been things we haven't found out yet which would have made it impossible for him to clear himself. I say that he was terrified when he learnt Charlton had been killed, and the excitement and the terror caused the heart attack and his sudden death."

"That's all very fine, William," exclaimed Jack Gannett quietly, after a moment's silence—"very fine indeed; but there's one weak link in it. If Alison was the man who went to the public-house and bought a flask of brandy and took it away with him, *how was it we didn't find the flask in the room?*"

Sergeant Verity's face fell, and he realised the force of Gannett's question. The room had been carefully searched by the police, but there was no bottle or flask of any kind about the place. The search had been perfect and complete.

"Your evidence has got mixed, William, like you," said Gannett, with a smile at his colleague's evident discomfiture. "Alison must have bought the late edition of the evening paper, because it was there; but your barmaid's fancy is no evidence that the man with the moustache was Alison—your barmaid doesn't corroborate the newsvendor, or prove anything, because the man who took the brandy away wasn't Alison. If it had been, the flask would have been somewhere about. How much did he buy?"

'It was a shilling flask, I believe—they keep them ready filled for sale over the counter."

"Well, William, you'll have to come round to my way of thinking presently. You've evidently gone on the wrong tack yourself. The best thing we can do is to work together, and find some one we can plant on the Duke. We haven't a shadow of evidence to go on yet."

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Sergeant Gannett had dismissed Verity's "points" with a laugh of incredulity. But directly he had parted from his colleague his face became serious and he knitted his brows.

"I can't quite make that brandy business out," he said to himself. "It *might* have been Alison, because he certainly bought a paper—the paper was there. That hawker says he sold a paper to a man answering Alison's description, and the man came out of the public-house agitated and evidently in a hurry. I'll find the hawker and I'll find the barmaid."

Sergeant Gannett went to Exton Street that afternoon. He had not succeeded in finding the newspaper boy, but he knew he would have no difficulty in getting the name and address out of Verity. He didn't want to ask him at once, or to appear interested, as he was anxious to make his present inquiries without Verity

suspecting what he was doing. He had an idea that he might be on the track of a discovery, which would enable him to triumph over his colleague and make a distinct score with his superiors.

His first visit was to the Chipchases, where he saw Lobelia. Lobelia was quite sure that she had not seen a glass brandy flask, or anything of the sort, about the place. The doors of the rooms were all open the night she went to the music-hall, she hadn't locked any of them before she went out, and Mr. Alison might, of course, have gone into the parlour or the kitchen and drunk some of the brandy and put the flask there, but none had been found. The detective didn't suppose for a minute that a man would buy brandy and leave it in somebody else's room, but he wanted to make sure. Mrs. Chipchase bridled up at being interrogated again. It was bad enough to have the neighbours think she let lodgings to convicts, without her place being made a house of call for the police. But she was positive that no small bottle or flask, as described by the detective, had been found about her house since the "tragedy."

Then Gannett went over to the public-house and saw the barmaid. She described the man who bought the brandy, and Gannett felt convinced that it really was Alison—Alison with his moustache on. He was not a regular customer. She never remembered to have seen him in the house before. As far as she could remember, he said, "Give me some brandy—quickly, please—to take away." He seemed very agitated and upset, and that attracted her attention, as she thought he must want it for some one who was very ill.

"He said 'to take away'?"

"Yes."

"You are sure he didn't drink any at the bar? He didn't take the cork out and drink some directly you gave it him?"

"No—I'm sure of that. I said, 'A shilling, please,' and he put the money down and almost ran out of the bar."

"Thank you, my dear," said Gannett, and was going out when a thought occurred to him and he turned back again.

"Can you show me the sort of flask you sold him?"

The girl went to the back of the bar and picked up a small flask already filled, and handed it to the detective, who looked at it carefully.

It was the ordinary flask as sold at railway buffets and in public-houses. On the front of the bottle was a label with the name of the house and of the proprietor on it. "The Rose and Crown—William Gilbert."

"Thanks — I'll take this." Gannett put down his shilling and went out of the swinging doors into the street.

He was puzzled. This was something that the more he thought round it the more mysterious it became.

He had no doubt now that Verity had "stumbled" upon an important discovery—the word was Gannett's—and that on the night of his sudden death and very shortly before the fatal seizure Stephen Alison had been out without any attempt at disguise, and had purchased the brandy "to take away with him."

There were two things that puzzled him. If Alison felt ill — if he had preliminary heart symptoms — why didn't he have some brandy at once? He might have had the flask to take away in case of a return of the pain or faintness, or whatever it was, but surely he would have a glass of brandy there and then as well.

But having taken the brandy away he wouldn't put it down and go to his room without it.

He must have had it in his room—he died in his room. But the flask was not found by the police when the room was searched immediately after their arrival, nor in the later search, when each portion of it was again gone over with the minutest care.

"There's only one solution," said Gannett, as he stood stock-still and stared at the pavement, entirely lost to everything that was happening round him—"only one possible solution. There was some one in the room with Stephen Alison the night he died, and whoever it was must have taken the brandy flask away with him—or her."

CHAPTER XXXIX

CATHERINE WEBER

A PALE-FACED woman of three-and-thirty, with fair hair—the peculiar flaxen hair that you only find in some parts of Germany, hair that seems to have been golden once and bleached in the sun—got out of a third-class carriage at King's Cross terminus.

She looked tired and worn, for she had been travelling all night and part of the previous day. She had come from a small place beyond Perth.

She took her rug and a small hand-bag from the carriage, and then walked up and down the platform among the few people who had gathered there to meet friends from the north.

When she lifted her eyes you saw at once that there was something peculiar in them. They were the large German blue eyes that one finds generally with the German flaxen hair, but they were not the ordinary blue—their hue was nearer that of the cornflower.

But it was not the colour of the woman's eyes that caused the passer-by who encountered her gaze to be fascinated by them.

They were the eyes of a saint—the eyes of a martyr. They seemed fixed on some far-away object with a patient, yearning look that appealed at once to the imagination.

Convinced that the person she was looking for was not on the platform, the woman made her way to the barrier within which the busy porters were rapidly piling up the luggage they were taking from the vans.

A tired, impatient crowd of passengers stood outside the barriers scanning the boxes and portmanteaus eagerly. Under the absurd system which prevails on the English railway lines, it is always by the blessing of Providence that a traveller gets his own luggage at all. In the ordinary affairs of life no one would hand over to a perfect stranger a hundred pounds' worth of property simply on

his bare assertion that it was his. But at the railway station any one can point to a trunk or a portmanteau and say, "That's mine," and an obliging porter instantly puts it on to a cab for him. This arrangement causes every traveller on an English railway to watch for the turning up of his luggage very much as the gambler watches for the turning up of a number at the roulette table. When he sees it and has secured a porter, and has it once again safely in his possession, he heaves a great sigh of relief.

The pale-faced, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed woman joined the crowd at the barrier, but she displayed no anxiety. The porters seized trunks and boxes and took them off to cabs, and the crowd gradually thinned.

No porter came to her.

Porters from long experience can reckon up the travellers in a moment, and the woman didn't look "a good job." She hadn't the shilling or sixpenny look that the railway porter loves. Her gloves were black and worn, her dress was plain and dark, and the material was cheap.

When there was hardly anybody left, but still a little pile of luggage, the woman thought she saw her box, and said quietly, "I think that is mine—will you take it to the cloak-room for me?"

The porter looked at the luggage—there were three or four common travelling trunks, all very much alike.

"Any name on yours, ma'am," he said, civilly enough.

"Yes, Weber."

"Vayber—Vayber!" said the porter—"that ain't the name—this is labelled Miss Catherine Weber"—he pronounced it "Webber" in the English fashion—"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Yes, it is a German name. Weber—that is it."

The porter shouldered the box and carried it to the cloak-room, and when he took the twopence which the lady handed him he touched his hat. There was a look in her wonderful eyes that would have made him do it if Catherine Weber had given him nothing at all.

Having deposited her luggage, Catherine Weber reflected for a moment as to what her next step should be.

While she was thinking a man entered the station

hurriedly, looked round, saw her on the seat, and came quickly towards her.

Raising his hat, and addressing her in German, he said, "Forgive me, Fräulein, that I am late—it was difficult to get away."

"I understand, my good Otto," said the woman pleasantly; "it is kind of you to come at all; but I have been away from London so long, and I did not know where to get rooms, so I wrote to you at the club you told me would always be your address."

"Yes, Fräulein, and I got the letter and looked about for a room for you when I had my afternoon off."

"I am afraid I have troubled you very much, Otto."

"Ah, Fräulein, it is no trouble; it is a pleasure. Would not any one of us from Rudesheim do anything we could for the daughter of our old doctor who was so good to everybody—so good that he made no money, and when he died you had to go to England to be a governess?"

"Yes—to leave the people I knew—the people I had grown up among, and be a governess—often not so well treated as a servant! But tell me, have you heard from Rudesheim? I have not written to the friends I left there for years—not since——" She checked herself, and added, in a different tone, "Tell me something of Rudesheim, if you have heard. Your father—is he alive still and well?"

"Yes, Fräulein, he still has the little hotel, but it is not doing well; he is old-fashioned, my father, and does not understand the English. Some day I shall go back speaking English, and understanding them, and I shall make the hotel all different."

"Ah, yes—we travel, we Germans; don't we? Travel and learn—and some of us go back and are happy again in the dear Fatherland."

"You will go back to Rudesheim some day, Fräulein?"

"No; I shall never go back. But come, I am keeping you, and you have been so good. Give me the address where you have taken my room."

Otto Muller, the waiter, drew an envelope from his pocket. "I have written the address there, Fräulein. It is a house kept by a German lady. She is glad to

have our people with her. I have made inquiries—it is moderate, and you will be very happy there, I am sure. Shall I get your luggage and have it put on a cab?"

"Ah, no—do not trouble; I know you want to get back quickly, do you not?"

"Yes, it was difficult to get away—if I had not been able to come I should have sent some one; but I have managed it, and if you will let me I will go."

"Yes—do not wait. I shall go to the buffet now I have seen you and have some soup—I have had a long journey. You will call perhaps one afternoon when you are free and see me. It is always pleasant to me to talk of Rudesheim and the old friends there."

"Yes, Fräulein, I will call. Ah, I have forgotten—I have a strange thing to tell you—I do not want to pain you; but it is so strange, I must tell you."

"Nothing can pain me much now," said Catherine Weber, and there came a look of infinite sadness in the big blue eyes. "What is your news? Some one is dead at Rudesheim?"

"No, Fräulein, it is not that. What I wish to tell you is that there came lately to our hotel the man you told me poor Mr. Freiligrath was with in South Africa—when the trouble happened."

Catherine Weber lifted her eyes and looked earnestly at Otto Muller, but her face did not change, and her voice was soft and silvery.

"The man Mr. Freiligarth was with in South Africa—you mean Clement Hansell?"

"Yes—I remembered the name—we knew it in Rudesheim, for everybody pitied you when the story came to us, and we heard your betrothed was dead."

"Clement Hansell stayed at your hotel?" said Catherine Weber quietly. "And is he there now?"

"No—he is very rich, it seems. He has come to stay in London. He has taken a great house—No. — Grosvenor Place. It is near Hyde Park—oh, a great fine mansion, I believe."

"Thank you, my good Otto. You have not pained me. I have learnt at last to think of the past without tears. But you must go—I shall be able to see to every-

thing now. I have the address. Good-bye, and don't forget to come if you can."

The waiter raised his hat, and, taking the woman's proffered hand, pressed it respectfully and left her.

. . . . . .

Catherine Weber had found the house to which Otto Muller had sent her everything that he had described it to be. The landlady, a motherly German frau, had made her welcome, and had at once taken a fancy to the pale-faced woman with the eyes of a saint.

She had tried her best to make her new guest comfortable, but had not been able, in spite of a certain awe which she felt in the presence of the quiet, reserved woman, to resist the chattering propensity which was her weak point. Miss Weber had not been under the roof of the excellent Mrs. Bernstein an hour before the landlady had confided to her guest the story of her girlhood, marriage, family troubles, and widowhood, and had cordially invited Miss Weber to return the confidence.

But Catherine Weber did not respond. She was amiable to her landlady, and listened to her patiently and without comment. But when invited to narrate her own history, she smiled, and said she had none.

"I am a German governess in England. I left my home because my father died, and I found I should have to earn my own living. I have been in many situations. I have just left one, far away in the north of Scotland, where I have been with a family for three years. Now the family are going to travel abroad, and they do not want me."

"Then you are looking for something else now?"

Miss Weber did not reply, and Mrs. Bernstein, hoping that she would find her bedroom comfortable and have a good night's rest, which she must want very badly, closed the door and left her fellow-countrywoman to her own meditations.

Catherine Weber sat for a time in the easy-chair by the fireplace. There was no indication upon her pale face of anything but pleasure and restful thought. But the far-away look in her eyes was less dreamy than

usual. The object upon which she was gazing seemed to be nearer.

Presently she rose and went to her box, which had been placed in a corner of the little bedooom, and unlocked it. From a corner she drew a small writing-desk, and brought it to the little table in the centre of the room.

She lifted the lid, and from beneath a number of letters tied up with a narrow piece of black ribbon she drew an envelope, which she opened with a sigh.

From the envelope she took a photograph. It was the portrait of a handsome, stalwart young fellow with an unmistakable German face.

Catherine Weber looked at the portrait steadfastly for a moment—then raising it to her lips she kissed it reverently.

Then she spoke softly and soothingly as a mother speaks to a tired child—

"Max, my beloved—the oath I made the day I knew that you had been murdered I shall keep—and then, sweetheart, I shall come to you!"

No ripple of pain passed over the woman's face. In the sweet saintly eyes there was no gleam of hatred and revenge.

There was only the look of the love that waits patiently and knows no fear.

CHAPTER XL

SAMPSON GAYGOLD'S CLERK

Jack Darvell was in desperate straits for money. He had lost heavily in some recent Turf speculations, and his trade as a tout to Gaygold and other money-lenders, which was a profitable one, for his commission was large, had ceased.

The fact that he had introduced a ticket-of-leave man to Lord Charlton under a false name, and that this man was accused by the police of having committed the murder, had caused him to be avoided by all his associates

and acquaintances. Men whom he had been in the habit of calling by their Christian names cut him dead, and the first time he showed himself on a racecourse after the inquest the comments of the frequenters of Tattersall's Ring who knew him were deliberately insulting. No decent man or woman would be seen speaking to him, and he felt that his occupation as a gentleman blackleg was gone for ever in this country.

His last hope was his share of the twenty thousand. That would give him enough to go away with until the storm blew over. But Gaygold had made a communication which showed him plainly that the insurance people were holding off, on the chance of some evidence turning up to show that there had been foul play in direct connection with the policy.

To add to his perplexities, Mr. Joyce had been impressed by the current gossip, and although Darvell had always been kind to him, he was urging his daughter to insist on a separation, and Molly, who had been greatly affected by the murder, had partially yielded to her father's views.

She talked of returning to the music-hall stage and going on an extended tour in the provinces, and Darvell ascertained that she had already been to see an agent to fix up the engagements—and her father was going to travel with her.

Darvell was nervous and apprehensive. He saw that he was an object of suspicion, even to his own wife. He was not likely to get the money he wanted from her, and money he must have. His idea was to slip away quietly and go to America. Gaygold was anxious that there should be no communication between them. If he worried Gaygold, the chances were that worthy in his cowardice would pay him a good sum to clear out of the country.

He determined to call on the money-lender the next morning, and play a game which in the language of the fraternity is known as "bluff."

. . . . . .

Master Bliss, the innocent-looking young clerk of Sampson Gaygold, did not reciprocate the admiration of

his employer. He hated him with a frank, boyish hatred that it cost him a considerable effort to conceal. He had accepted the money-lender's offer of a stool and a salary, because when his father, the sea captain, was sold up, it was necessary that he should find something to do.

He called one day with a pitiful letter from his father, begging that the money-lender would be merciful, and allow him a few weeks' grace before selling him up. "Grace" was an article Mr. Gaygold was always happy to deal in, provided the person who wanted it could afford to pay a fancy price for the luxury. Captain Bliss could pay nothing, so his goods were seized, and after the sale he found himself still a matter of £80 odd in the money-lender's debt.

Then Mr. Gaygold was magnanimous—nay, generous. He offered to give young Bliss £1 a week salary, and deduct half of it until the father's debt *and the interest thereon* had been paid off. Herbert Bliss did his duty to his employer as long as he was in the office. He was polite to everybody, he was punctual, and his handwriting was as innocent as his smile.

The envelopes that Master Bliss directed for his employer were always opened without hesitation. As a rule, you can tell the writing of a solicitor's or a money-lender's clerk in a second, and if you are not eager to peruse a communication of that sort you throw it aside. But Master Bliss's writing never gave the Gaygold clients a moment's uneasiness—until they grew familiar with it. Some of the money-lender's clients were at first so thrown off their guard by it that they thought it covered a charitable appeal, and allowed their wives to open the letter. It was Master Bliss's luncheon time. He knocked at the door of Mr. Gaygold's private room.

"I'm going to lunch now, sir."

"All right," replied his employer, and Master Bliss went out.

Instead of sauntering along as usual, he walked rapidly until he came to a side street. He turned up this and entered a quiet square. In the square he saw a man walking up and down. The man was Sergeant Verity.

The sergeant had heard of Master Bliss from one of Gaygold's clients, and had approached the lad cautiously to sound him. Verity soon found out that he looked upon his employer with loathing and contempt, and he encouraged the young man's confidence, telling him plainly that the police wanted to find out how far Darvell and Gaygold had been working together in certain transactions.

Master Bliss's information left no doubt in the sergeant's mind that they were both interested in fleecing Lord Charlton, and one or two remarks Bliss had overheard convinced him that Darvell was to benefit by the £20,000 insurance in the event of Lord Charlton's death.

"Well, my lad," said the sergeant, as Master Bliss approached him, "any more news?"

"Yes—Darvell called this morning and went in at the private door. They had a row and raised their voices. Darvell asked for cash, and Gaygold cursed him, and said he'd bungled the whole business, and they'd never get a penny of the insurance money now. Then they spoke lower, and I couldn't hear a word though I listened close to the door. But Darvell got money, because the governor drew a cheque for £300, and I was sent out to cash it and bring back notes."

"Ah," said the sergeant. "Now you get back again. You've done your work well, and I'll see that you're rewarded for it."

"I don't want anything," said the boy proudly. "I'm not selling anybody. I'm only doing this because I believe Gaygold's a thief. He ruined my father, and I always meant to pay him for that some day, if I got the chance."

"Well, I think you've got it, my lad," said the sergeant kindly, "and are doing a service to society at the same time. Now, off you go—don't be late, or you might lose your berth, and we don't want that."

Master Bliss nodded and hurried off to resume his duties, and the sergeant went on his way meditatively. Nothing could shake him in his belief that, had Stephen Alison been concerned in the murder, he would, with the money in his possession, have left London the first thing the next day. Yet every step he took to elucidate the

mystery only seemed to bear out Jack Gannett's theory of Alison's guilt.

There was no doubt now, if the young clerk's report of the conversation he had managed to overhear was correct, that Darvell and Gaygold had been looking forward to the insurance money, and that it was in the deliberate manner in which Lord Charlton had been done away with that the affair had been "bungled."

The sergeant made his report to the authorities. But it was not considered politic to arrest Darvell at present. The evidence of a lad listening at keyholes was all right as far as it went, but they wanted something stronger than that before they made their "coup." The order was that Darvell was to be closely shadowed. If he attempted to leave the country, then a direct move would have to be made. Shortly after making his report, Verity met Gannett, and told him what had occurred.

Gannett smiled. "If that's all you've done, William," he said, "you haven't done much. There hasn't been a doubt in my mind from the first but that Darvell was in it. I'm on a much more exciting trail."

"The brandy flask?" said Verity.

"Well, round it. I told you Stephen Alison must have had a visitor at Exton Street that night, and now I think I know who it was."

"You do?" exclaimed Verity excitedly. "Tell me, Jack; tell me!"

"I'll tell my story my own way, if you don't mind, William. The public-house people have been chattering, and that brandy-bottle story's got into one of the evening papers."

"'Our Crime Investigator,'" groaned Verity. "I read it. The Press is a grand institution, Jack, but it does interfere with our work sometimes."

"Well, it's interfered to a good purpose this time. The 'Crime Investigator' article was read by Weston—you know him, the private inquiry agent—and being a pal of mine in the old days when he was in the Force, he sent me a line to come and see him, and he gave me what our friends the newspapers call 'a startling piece of information.'"

"Well—well?"

"The day before Alison was found dead, a swell came to him to make inquiries about somebody. He wanted a man traced. He gave the agent the particulars, and called again the next day for information. Weston had done the job then, and he gave his client the address he wanted."

"And that address was——?"

"No. — Exton Street. Weston's client was in search of Stephen Alison."

"And this person you think was Stephen Alison's visitor that night?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"The client didn't give his name, but Weston has given me an excellent description of him. William, you go your way and I'll go mine; but I believe I've got the trump card in my hand, and when I play it I shall astonish you."

. . . . . .

Mr. Weston, the inquiry agent, on the day that the murder of Lord Charlton was discovered, had left London at a minute's notice on business that had taken him to an out-of-the-way little town in Belgium. There he had had to remain for some days busily engaged in investigating for a client a case which took up his entire time and completely engrossed him. He was beyond the reach of the English papers, and the only thing he saw when he glanced at a Belgian one was that an English nobleman had been found murdered under mysterious circumstances.

It was not until he returned to town that he got into touch with London affairs again, and the first thing he saw in connection with the Grosvenor Place crime was the story of the missing brandy flask as told by "Our Crime Investigator." Then the name of Stephen Alison struck him, and he sent for Gannett, who was an old friend of his, and told him of the client who had employed him to find out Stephen Alison's present whereabouts.

He had given the stranger Alison's address in Exton Street on the very day that Alison had been found dead.

Jack Gannett listened attentively to Weston's narrative, and then inquired as to the personal appearance of the client who refused his name. As Weston proceeded with his description, the detective's face became serious. He listened attentively, but said nothing until the inquiry agent had finished. Gannett thanked him, and begged him for the present to keep his information absolutely to himself.

When Gannett left he at once began to search out as far as he could the family history of Stephen Alison. He turned to the record of the Turf Fraud trial and the police notes on the case, and he found that Stephen had occupied a good position until he lost his fortune by the failure of Alison & Co.—a firm the head and sole manager of which was John Alison, Stephen's brother.

John Alison had absconded, and nothing had been heard of him since.

When he had finished his investigation Gannett felt convinced that Weston's mysterious client was no other than John Alison. John Alison had learnt his brother's address in Exton Street.

CHAPTER XLI

FATHER AND SON

The news of her husband's death under such terrible circumstances had so utterly prostrated Marion Alison that at first it was believed that she had had her death-blow. The story was told to her as gently as possible. She was brought up to London ostensibly to see the Captain, and it was he who on her arrival gradually let her know the painful truth, and that she would be required by the police to view the body, and to give evidence as to its identity with her husband.

That ordeal was mercifully spared her. Utterly prostrated by the shock, the doctor who was called in certified that she was unable to leave her bed, and Captain Halford was allowed to give evidence as a relative instead.

May had at first hardly been able to realise the full meaning of the story she read in the newspapers. She had believed that her father was dead, and her first impression was that there must be some mistake. When she learned the truth, that her father had been a convict, and that only his terribly sudden death had saved him from being charged with taking the life of another man, the girl's first thought was almost one of relief that her father had escaped. Gradually, however, she understood what this revelation must mean to her mother and her. They would always hereafter be identified with a crime which had thrilled all England with horror.

May's unselfish nature saved her from brooding too deeply over the misfortune that had overtaken her. Her mother was ill. Her mother required all the care and devotion that a daughter could bestow upon her. By her mother's bedside May controlled herself admirably. All her thought was for the sufferer, and Mrs. Alison found her one earthly consolation in the love of her child.

Dennis Avory only saw the Captain when he called. He wanted to see May to tell her how deep his sympathy was with them all in their crushing sorrow, but he knew that ordeal would be too painful—that May herself would shrink from it. He hoped with all his heart the discovery of the thieves might yet clear the memory of May's father from the graver charge, and in conversing with the Captain he forced himself to take the more hopeful view.

It was only when he could no longer see May—when the hopelessness of his ever asking her to be his wife came home to him—that he realised how deeply he had grown to love the beautiful and gentle girl. It was the love still strong within his heart that took him to the Captain whenever he had an excuse for a visit. At least, if he could not see May, he could talk with some one who was constantly in her presence. He could inquire after her—he could speak her name aloud and hear it spoken.

He had been glad of the opportunity of helping Cecil Halford by introducing him to Mr. Hansell. He felt that at least he was doing something.

When he spoke of Mr. Hansell to the Captain he was loud in his employer's praises. He was quite different in his ways and in his style from what Dennis had expected to find him. The young man was drawn toward his employer from the day of the first meeting at Grosvenor Place. He felt instinctively that he was dealing with a man of gentle disposition and generous sympathies—a man who, once a friend, would be always a friend—a man who had suffered himself at some period of his existence, and had learnt the lessons of life from practical experience.

"In the little time that I have been with Mr. Hansell," said Dennis to the Captain, "I have learnt not only to respect him but to love him. He is the sort of man who wins your sympathy at once. You feel that he has some great sorrow which he is hiding from the world, and you long to do something to make him happy. There is nothing I would not do for him if ever he had need of my assistance or my championship. But, of course, there is never likely to be. He is immensely wealthy. He hasn't —so far as I can gather—a relative in the world, and whatever his sorrow is, I think it is of the past and not of to-day."

Dennis Avory's description of Mr. Hansell had interested the Captain, and when Cecil came to the hotel (Mrs. Alison's illness had prevented them leaving it) after his interview with the wealthy South African, Captain Halford questioned his son as to the man who had taken so firm a hold upon Dennis Avory's affection. Cecil was as full of enthusiasm as Dennis had been.

"He's a splendid fellow!" he exclaimed.

"And this appointment that you want, Cecil—has he found it for you? Has he given you a letter of introduction, or what?"

"He hasn't given me any letter of introduction," said Cecil, after a moment's hesitation; "he advises me to go on reading for the Bar."

"But I thought—you wrote me in your letter—I understood from your own lips—that you had abandoned the idea."

"I had, father. When I found out that I had been a tax upon you at a time when you could not afford

it, I made up my mind to earn money for myself at once."

"But the situation has not improved—in fact," said the Captain gravely, "it has become worse. I shall have to economise, Cecil, in every possible way I can. I must and will continue the allowance I have made you if you still intend to go to the Bar, but it is quite impossible that I can do more. If you owe money—if there is anything you have not told me—and I have been afraid all along that there is——"

"Father, I won't deceive you," exclaimed the young man. "You have been the best and kindest father a fellow ever had, and I couldn't rest if I kept anything from you. I told Mr. Hansell I was in debt; he made me tell him what I owed—he has given me a cheque for a thousand pounds." Cecil took the cheque from his pocket and held it towards his father. A thousand pounds! Captain Halford took the cheque mechanically, but he scarcely looked at it. His big blue eyes were staring at Cecil in wonder, and his face had flushed suddenly. In his indignation at a stranger offering money to a Halford the old irritability which trouble had crushed was once more strong upon him.

"I won't have it—you shan't take it!" he exclaimed, trembling with suppressed wrath. "The Halfords are not paupers. Confound it, sir, you ought to have had more pride than to accept it. You will be going round with a subscription list next, knocking at people's doors with a begging-letter. Confound it, I suppose you'd see no harm in standing at the corner of a street and holding out your hat?"

The young man's face flushed.

"I didn't ask for it, sir," he exclaimed, "or expect it. When Mr. Hansell gave it to me he said it was a loan. I didn't see the matter as you do then, but I see it now. I will send it back."

"No, I'll see Mr Hansell myself. He meant it well—he's a good fellow. I'll explain—I'll——"

Suddenly the Captain's face fell.

"You told this man what you owed," he gasped, "and he gave you this cheque! Cecil, do you owe a thousand pounds?"

"Yes, sir; very nearly." The Captain groaned.

"Very well; your debts must be paid, but by me. I shall have to find the money somehow, but you can't take his, Cecil; you can't. I must think what is best to be done, but I shall take this cheque back to Mr. Hansell this afternoon."

Cecil bent his head. "You are right, sir," he said. "But these debts of mine—they need not all be paid now—I can get time. I'll earn money and pay when I can. I can't bear to think that I have not only brought pain and sorrow on you, but that I have added this burden as well."

The Captain's big blue eyes filled with tears as he laid his hand kindly on his son's shoulder.

"I forgive you, Cecil," he said. "To-day I shall take this gift back to Mr. Hansell; to-morrow you and I will put our heads together and see what can be done."

The young man went out of the room, pale and crestfallen. When the door had closed behind him Captain Halford sank into a chair and gave a deep groan.

"I will pay it," he said; "but it will be a terrible strain at the best. At the worst——"

He rose and squared his shoulders, and breathed a deep breath. "No—I'm not going to meet trouble half-way," he exclaimed. "The next mail may bring me better news—I won't look at the worst side until the last vestige of hope is gone."

. . . . . .

Stephen Alison was in the library, looking over a number of his brother's papers, when a servant entered and said that a gentleman named Halford wished to know if Mr. Hansell could see him.

When the Captain arrived at Grosvenor Place, he found that he had forgotten his card-case. He gave his name to the footman as Captain Halford, and was shown into an ante-room, where he found three or four people, who had all called to see the millionaire, were waiting.

The servant took the names of the guests in one by one, but Stephen, who knew none of them, refused to see them, and sent to each the usual message. They

had better write to Mr. Dennis Avory and explain their business, and if necessary he would make an appointment to see them.

Dennis was out at the time, so the names were submitted personally to Mr. Hansell. By the time it was the Captain's turn to have his name taken in the servant had partially forgotten it.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but did you say Halton?"

"No, Halford," replied the Captain.

The consequence was that when the servant went to his master again he said that Mr. Halford wished to see him. Stephen imagined that it was Cecil who had returned, and sent a kindly message.

"Say that I am engaged, but if he will wait for a few minutes I will see him. When I ring the bell you can show Mr. Halford in."

Stephen wanted a little time to think what he should say to the young man. He wanted to lead him on to talk of Sergeant Verity. He thought that perhaps in some way he might, through Cecil's acquaintance with the sergeant's niece, be able to learn what the sergeant was doing.

A statement which he had seen in one of the papers had alarmed him. Inquiries were being made at the public-house to which he had gone that night for the brandy when his brother was taken ill. The "Crime Investigator" who was working the case up from a newspaper point of view wrote guardedly, but the implication was there that the police had reason to believe that on the night Stephen Alison was found dead he had received a visitor, and that his visitor must have taken the flask away with him, as no trace of it had been found at Exton Street.

Stephen remembered that after he had completed the disguise he had seen the flask lying by the side of the bed.

He had found it in the pocket of his overcoat the next morning. He had washed off the label and burnt it, and put the bottle away at the back of a cupboard in his bedroom—a cupboard in which he had put the deed-box of his brother, and which he kept locked.

When Stephen had mentally arranged the manner in which he should lead Cecil on to talk of the Veritys he touched the bell and the servant came in, and his master told him that he would see Mr. Halford at once. A minute later the servant announced "Mr. Halford," and closed the door.

Stephen was standing with his foot on the fender looking into the fire when his visitor entered. The Captain advanced a few steps, and the millionaire turned round to greet his visitor. In a moment he saw the mistake that had been made, but with a great effort he controlled himself and stifled the cry of dismay that rose to his lips. The moment the Captain saw Clement Hansell's face he started back with an exclamation of horror.

"Who are you?" he cried, in a hoarse voice. "Who are you?"

In one swift moment Stephen saw his only chance. Advancing slowly towards the Captain, who thought that a dead man had risen from his grave, he said quietly: "I am John Alison!"

CHAPTER XLII

JOHN ALISON'S STORY

"I AM John Alison!"

Captain Halford, with something approaching terror in his face, still gazed at Stephen. For a moment or two he was unable to realise what the words meant.

Then he remembered how great the likeness had been between the two men, and he began to understand. He had seen little of Stephen after his sister became Mrs. Alison; he had seen scarcely anything of John; but the family history was of course known to him.

"You are John Alison?" he said, as soon as he had partially recovered himself. "You are the scoundrel who ruined your brother and brought your sister to the grave? You are here under a false name—a man said to be a millionaire?"

"Yes, but I have been but a short time in England. I wanted to find a means of atoning for the past—of returning the fortune of which I had robbed my brother. Chance brought your son to me—I dared not tell him who I was, but I tried to help him. It was the first service I had been able to render a Halford."

"I came to bring the cheque back to Clement Hansell," said the Captain proudly—"I shall restore it to John Alison."

"No, you must not do that—you must think of it as your own—for had Stephen lived to receive the money he had a right to expect from me, he would have considered himself your debtor for a far larger sum than that. When his misfortune came it was you who gave his wife and child a home."

"Stephen Alison's wife was my sister—it was my duty to do what I did."

"Yes—and it is my duty to give her back the money I stole from her husband. Ah, Captain Halford, you will let me pay the sum to your credit at your bank? Half my fortune—all my fortune shall be theirs."

"What you do for Stephen's wife and child will not be generosity on your part, John Alison; it will be an act of justice."

"And when I have done this," said Stephen nervously, "when I have proved to you that I am not the John Alison of the years gone by—will you let me see Marion Alison alone—will you let me tell her how sincere is my repentance for the past — will you let me ask her to forgive me?"

"You shall not see her!" exclaimed the Captain. "How could my poor sister bear to look upon you, who are the living image of her dead husband — you who through your villainy have left her the widow of a man whose memory is for ever blackened by the belief that only the merciful hand of death saved him from the gallows!"

"He was innocent!" exclaimed Stephen.

"I hope so—I try to believe so," said the Captain, "but that will never be proved now."

"It can be proved—it must be proved!"

"Who can prove it?"

"I can."

The Captain stared in blank astonishment at the man he believed to be John Alison.

"*You* can prove it! How?"

"On the night Stephen Alison died I was with him."

"With him in his room in Exton Street?"

"Yes. I ascertained where my brother was, and I called on him. It was not a pleasant meeting at first, but I won his forgiveness at last, and it was when we were talking that he heard the murder shouted in the street. He went out and bought a paper. When he came back he was pale and terribly agitated. Then he told me everything. He was an innocent man. It was the terror that came upon him when he realised the situation in which he was placed that caused the heart attack which killed him."

"And you, his brother, left him there—you made no sign—knowing his innocence, you did not come forward?"

Stephen hesitated. He was inclined to confess the truth, but if he said to Captain Halford, "I am not John but Stephen," he might not be able to do what he wanted to do. The Captain might refuse to be a party to the imposition—refuse to take the money he intended to make over to his wife and daughter. No; for the present he would be John Alison.

"You don't answer," said the Captain. "You know the truth. You heard Stephen's last words, and you have allowed this suspicion to rest on his memory!"

"Had I come forward I must have said who I was. Remember, I am Clement Hansell, the millionaire. I do not wish the world to know that I am John Alison who absconded from his creditors, who robbed his own kindred, who brought his brother to ruin!"

"You were a coward then!" said the Captain. "You are a coward now! You might have saved his wife and daughter at least this last shame. You shall do it now!"

"Yes—if you will help me."

"Help you? Yes, I will help you by calling the police. You shall say in a court of justice what you have said to me."

The Captain's baby-blue eyes were starting from his head with indignation, and his breath came fast and quickly. In the presence of this man, who was the cause of all the sorrow that had darkened his sister's life, he felt cruel, vindictive, eager for revenge. The magnificent surroundings of John Alison's house seemed to him an infamy when he thought of Stephen's later life.

The millionaire waited until the Captain's wrath had spent itself a little. Then he said quietly—

"If you betray me I can do nothing—if you will help me I can do everything. My mere statement of what Stephen said to me would go for nothing. His innocence can only be proved when the guilt of others is made plain."

"And you can do that?"

"Yes—what Stephen said to me that night will give the police a clue upon which they may work."

"Then go to them."

"No—I have told you why I cannot. If you will carry out my instructions, asking me no questions now, I promise you that Stephen Alison's innocence shall be made clear to the world in time."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Send your son Cecil to me again."

"What can he do? I don't understand."

"I have told you you must ask no questions yet. Will you send him?"

The Captain hesitated a moment. After all, there could be no harm. Alison by his gift to Cecil had shown that he was really desirous of atoning for the past.

"Yes, I will send Cecil," said the Captain. "For my sister's sake, for my niece's sake, it is my duty to do all I can to clear Stephen's memory. You say that if I do as you ask you will accomplish that—I take your word. But I give you no promise that I will remain silent as to your identity if it seems to me at any time that justice demands that I should speak."

"Beyond that I do not ask you to bind yourself," said Stephen Alison. "Now find your son and send him to me as quickly as you can."

. . . . . .

Captain Halford, when he found his son, told the astonished young man that the millionaire from whom he had received the cheque was no other than John Alison, Stephen Alison's brother. The Captain told enough of the family history to let Cecil understand why John Alison had been so generous to him, and with a full knowledge of all that had transpired during the Captain's interview with Clement Hansell, Cecil went to Grosvenor Place.

The millionaire saw at a glance when the young man entered that the truth had been told him.

"Mr. Halford," he said, "your father has, I have no doubt, told you my secret?"

"Yes, and that you want to see me, because I can help you over this terrible affair. But how can I do that?"

"I will be plain with you. You told me of a young lady—a Miss Verity. Her uncle, you said, is a Scotland Yard detective, and he is convinced that my brother was an innocent man."

"So Jenny told me."

"It is this man, this detective, I want to communicate with. I want him to know the true story of Stephen's connection with Darvell—why he went to Lord Charlton's that night."

"Am I to tell him who you are, that you were with Stephen at Exton Street the night he died?"

"No. You must make a bargain with him first. Tell him that you can take him to a man who can give this information, which you believe would enable him to unravel the mystery of the crime, and clear Stephen Alison; but you will take him on one condition only—on that you must insist—that he uses the information without bringing the man who gives it him into the matter."

"Will he accept the condition?"

"Yes. He will make one condition—that the person you take him to must not be an accomplice. He is bound to do that. You can accept it and leave the rest to me."

"And am I to bring him here?"

"Yes; when you have his promise."

"I'll try my best—but—you see—I—I don't know this man."

"You know his niece. Can you go to her now?"

"Not to her home. I—I don't visit there, because her people don't know anything yet; but I can send her a note, and she'll meet me somewhere. But hadn't I better go to Scotland Yard and find the sergeant and tell him myself?"

"No; let it come through the girl first. Let her bring you together. At the Yard things mightn't be so easy to arrange as I want them."

Cecil Halford remained with Clement Hansell for another quarter of an hour, during which the latter gave him minute and careful instructions as to the way in which he was to conduct the negotiations, and then the young man left, to carry out to the best of his ability the serious task which had been entrusted to him.

. . . . . .

Stephen Alison had determined to play a bold stroke. He had deceived Captain Halford, who had accepted him as John Alison. The extraordinary circumstances under which he had been able to enter into possession of his brother's property were not likely to suggest themselves to any one. Seeing him in possession of a vast establishment with wealth at his command, it would not occur to any one that he was the penniless ex-convict who only a short time ago was living in one room in a side street of the Euston Road. Such an idea had not entered the Captain's mind—it would *not* enter into the sergeant's calculations.

Sergeant Verity had seen more of him than the Captain had—he had seen him only a short time before the murder—he would be more struck by the likeness, perhaps, than the Captain was. But the sergeant, who had arrested him for the Turf Frauds, knew the family history also. He knew that John Alison, Stephen's twin brother, had ruined him, and he would remember what was current gossip at the time—that John and Stephen were so much alike, that clean-shaven you would not know one from the other.

To the sergeant he would be, as he had been to Captain Halford—John Alison. As John Alison he would confess that, returning from South Africa, he had sought for his brother, and found him at Exton Street. He would tell the story that he was supposed to have heard from Stephen's lips again, and the story would be accepted. He would denounce Darvell and Gaygold—tell them Stephen really went to save Lord Charlton. And he would say that when he read of the murder Stephen had told him of the offer that the Duke had made him that night in Piccadilly—an offer which pointed clearly to the fact that the Duke was then plotting a burglary very similar to that which happened at Grosvenor Place.

"Cecil must not bring him here," said Stephen to himself, "unless be obtains his solemn promise to respect my secret, and if Sergeant Verity pledges his word he will keep it."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE GERMAN WAITER

Otto Muller, the German waiter, had an evening off, and went to call upon his countrywoman. Catherine Weber had asked him, saying she wanted to see him. He would have done anything for her—as would any Rudesheimer, male or female—for the sake of the good doctor, her father, who had been beloved by gentle and simple alike; whose name among the good folks of the Rhineland town was still a household word.

There was no one at the time in the sitting-rooms on Otto's floor, so that he found no difficulty in obtaining the evening off.

It was seven o'clock when he reached the house of Mrs. Bernstein, and was shown into Miss Weber's sitting-room.

Catherine Weber was dressed for walking. When Otto entered, she rose and came towards him.

"Ah, my good Otto," she said, "it is kind of you

to come. And you have the whole evening free—is that so?"

"Yes, Fräulein, all the evening is at your service."

"You may think it a strange request I have to make to you."

"Whatever it is, you are sure, Fräulein, that I shall do my best to obey it."

"Sit down then, and I will tell you. I have been twice to the address you gave me to see Mr. Hansell."

"You want to see him?"

"Yes. I am without a place, you know, and I have no money saved. I must get something to do that I may live."

"Ah, and you think Mr. Hansell——?"

"If I tell him that I was the affianced wife of his partner, Max Freiligrath, he can't refuse at least to give me a recommendation. The recommendation of a rich man is half the battle, is it not?"

"Oh yes—and he must know many wealthy families. Did you see him?"

"No, each time it was the same answer—Mr. Hansell saw no one except by appointment. If I wanted to see him I must write to his secretary. Afterwards I watched the house, hoping to see him come out—to hear some one speak to him perhaps by name—for I do not know him by sight."

"It was a difficult task you set yourself. But what is there I can do?"

"Come with me this evening. As he enters his house you can point him out to me."

"Yes, but he may not come out or go in."

"Yes, he will come in some time."

"If he is out, yes; but he may be at home."

"No—this morning I tried to see him again—there was some one else on the doorstep waiting. When the servant opened the door I let the other person speak first. He went into the hall, and I followed and waited. It was a servant I had not seen before, and he thought I was with the man whose name he took in. The servant came back with a message—Mr. Hansell was engaged then—if the man came again that evening at nine Mr. Hansell could see him.

"'I can't call at nine—can I come earlier, say at seven?' said the man. The servant said that would be no use, Mr. Hansell was going out that evening and would not be back till nine. 'Ah,' said the man, 'then I must call to-morrow and take my chance.'

"He left, and the servant turned to me. 'I want to see Mr. Hansell,' I said, 'but as he is engaged I will call again.' 'It's no use, you must write and get an appointment.' He opened the door and I went out, and sent you a note at once, asking you to come to me this evening. We can wait. When Mr. Hansell comes back at nine he may be with other gentlemen. I shall not know him. You can point him out to me."

"Yes," said Otto, "I should know him at once. But if he will not see you, what is the use of your knowing him by sight?"

"Don't you understand? I am going to do a bold thing. You will speak to Mr. Hansell. He was kind to you at the hotel, and talked to you, you say?"

"Oh yes, he talked to me in German."

"Then he will not mind you speaking to him, and I shall have time to look at him and see what he is like."

"But you will not speak to him to-night, if I do this—it would look bad—it would look as though I waylaid him for you."

"Ah, you must not mind that if you are my friend."

"Ah," said Otto, "if that is what you want, let me say at once to him that you are my friend, and that I could not refuse you when you asked me to help you."

"Yes, you may say that if you like."

The German waiter thought the matter over, and evidently he didn't quite like it.

"But, after all, why should we wait and watch like this?" he said, after a pause. "Cannot I write all that I should say in a letter, and then if you send it him, perhaps he will see you?"

"No. He will always be out. He will write and say he can do nothing. When one is desperate, one must not be too particular—and I am desperate now. I must get something quickly, and I know no one who is so likely to help me as Max Freiligrath's partner. Come, it is

the first thing I have asked you, Otto—you will not refuse?"

"No, if you wish it, it shall be done, Fräulein. Who is there of Rudesheim who would refuse you anything?"

. . . . . .

On the morning that Captain Halford came to see him, Clement Hansell had arranged to go out in the evening with Dennis Avory. He rarely went out in the daytime, because he still had a feeling of nervousness, never knowing whom he might meet.

But in the evening, after the darkness had fallen, he would take long walks, and the exercise always raised his spirits considerably.

The man who had called upon him had brought a letter from his former employer. Clement Hansell wanted a valet, and this man had just returned from America and was looking out for a place. He had heard, as servants do hear in some mysterious way, that there was an opening with Mr. Hansell and he called.

Mr. Hansell was engaged, and had told his servant to tell the man to call again after nine and he would see him. "It's no good his calling earlier," he said, "because I shall be out."

It was this message that apprised Catherine Weber of his movements that evening.

At six Mr. Hansell went out with his secretary. They walked for an hour, and then dined quietly at an old-fashioned, quiet English restaurant, and soon after eight they set out again for a stroll through the West.

At five minutes to nine they were back again at Hyde Park Corner, and making their way towards Grosvenor Place.

On the opposite side of the road in the darkness Otto Muller and Catherine Weber were watching the millionaire's door. It was a bitterly cold night and very few people were about.

Clement Hansell had the collar of his fur coat turned up. It was a constant custom of his to do this during his evening strolls. He explained to Dennis that he

felt the change of climate very much, and the raw cold nights made him a little nervous, as he had a delicate throat.

But Otto Muller, watching keenly, for it was near the hour when Mr. Hansell should return, caught sight of the clean-shaven face in the lamplight, and said to his companion—

"That is Mr. Hansell, I believe—I will see."

He crossed the road, and as the gentleman with the fur-lined overcoat came to the steps of Mr. Clement Hansell's house he found himself face to face with a man who apparently wished to speak to him.

The man addressed Mr. Hansell in German. Mr. Hansell looked at him, and seeing he was a respectable-looking man and not a beggar, concluded he had made a mistake.

"I don't understand German, my good man," he said, and Catherine came strolling across the road.

Under her cloak her hand was fiercely clasped on the handle of a dagger.

Otto Muller stared at Mr. Clement Hansell in astonishment. He must have made a mistake—and yet——"

"Sie sprechen nicht Deutsch?" he exclaimed.

"I assure you, my good man," said Stephen impatiently, "you are making a mistake—I don't understand a word you are saying."

Catherine Weber drew nearer.

Dennis Avory, seeing that his employer was being annoyed by the persistence of the man, stepped forward to interfere.

"Don't you hear?" he said. "This gentleman doesn't understand you. Speak English if you have anything to say."

"He doesn't understand German?" said Otto Muller, still staring at the millionaire. "Then there is a mistake."

Catherine Weber was close to the millionaire now. Her hand grasped the dagger. Swift as thought she drew it from beneath her cloak and raised it to strike.

Neither Avory nor Stephen noticed her.

But Otto Muller had seen Catherine Weber approach. He saw the swift movements of her hand, he caught the

gleam of the steel. With a smothered cry he sprang forward and seized the woman's wrist and dragged her away.

"*That* was what you wanted to do!" he cried in German. "That is not Clement Hansell!"

CHAPTER XLIV

A RECOGNITION

JENNY VERITY had seen her uncle and told him the story of her acquaintance with Cecil. Then she had begged him to see the young man at once, as he had an important communication to make to him. The sergeant consented, and half-an-hour later Cecil and he were together.

Cecil had not said very much before the sergeant felt that he was about to be placed in possession of a family secret, and that he was within measurable distance of a clue to much that had been mysterious to him in connection with Stephen Alison.

He listened attentively to Cecil's proposition, and knowing that in dealing with the Halfords he was dealing with an honourable family, had no hesitation in accepting it.

"You will take me to a person who will give me valuable information, who will clear Stephen Alison," he said, "provided I do not discover his identity to the authorities? Well, I accept the conditions—take me to him."

. . . . . .

Sergeant Verity and Cecil were coming along Grosvenor Place at the time that Catherine Weber made her attack on Clement Hansell.

The sergeant saw the bright flash of the steel, and darting forward gripped the German woman by the arm as Stephen and Avory, who had not noticed his approach, entered the door and closed it behind them.

Otto Muller had hurried away and was lost in the darkness.

"Ring the bell," Verity said to Cecil. "This woman was going to attack the gentleman who entered the house—I must see if he can identify her."

Cecil was anxious as to what the strange scene could have meant, but he was bound to obey.

The sergeant wrested the dagger from the woman's loose grasp and took possession of it. A moment later they were in the hall of Mr. Hansell's house.

"Where is Mr. Hansell?" said Cecil.

"In the library, sir—he gave orders that if you called you were to be shown in at once."

. . . . . .

Stephen, who concluded the German had merely asked him something which he could not understand, and attached no importance to the meeting, for he had not seen the action of the woman, went into the library after inquiring if any one had called, and then told Dennis that he would not require his companionship any more that evening, as he was expecting visitors.

When Avory had gone he turned down the lamp, which was the only light in the room, and prepared himself for his interview with the sergeant. He was staring at the fire, lost in thought, when Cecil entered, followed by the sergeant and Catherine Weber.

Stephen stared at the woman in astonishment, but before he could say anything the sergeant, who had come close to him, started back with a cry and loosened his hold of his prisoner.

There was no time for hesitation. "Sergeant Verity," said the millionaire, steadying his voice with an effort, "I heard of you from Mr. Halford; I heard of your belief in Stephen Alison's innocence, and I wanted to see you to give you information which will be of service to you."

"Who are you?" exclaimed the sergeant. "The likeness——"

"I am Clement Hansell. When we are alone I will explain what is astonishing you; but I cannot do it in

the presence of this lady you have brought with you." He pointed to Catherine Weber.

"She tried to stab you," said the sergeant, bewildered, "but——"

"I did not touch him," said the woman quietly. "It was Clement Hansell I wished to kill. This man is *not* Clement Hansell. My friend told me Clement Hansell stayed at an hotel where my friend was. Clement Hansell spoke German to my friend. This man is *not* Clement Hansell, for he cannot speak German. I have done nothing—let me go."

She moved rapidly to the door. The sergeant went to stop her.

Stephen grasped his arm. "Let her go," he said. "I did not see her. She has not touched me. If you keep her, and bring me into the case, I can't tell you anything."

Before the sergeant could recover from the bewilderment which the whole scene had caused him, Catherine Weber had gone into the hall, opened the front door, and vanished into the darkness.

"You are not Clement Hansell," cried the sergeant; "you are here under a false name—you——"

"I can tell you now. I could not tell you while a stranger was in the room. Did you ever hear of John Alison—the twin brother of the man who was found dead in Exton Street?"

"You are John Alison?" said the sergeant, "and you are here living in this house as Clement Hansell, the millionaire from South Africa—you——"

"I changed my name when I left England years ago. I traded in South Africa as Clement Hansell," said Stephen Alison nervously. "When I came back here——"

"No," said the sergeant, eyeing his man keenly. "That woman, whatever her intentions towards Clement Hansell were, knows you are not the man. The real Clement Hansell has been in London; he stayed at an hotel, and spoke German. The man who was with her, and who knew Clement Hansell, told her you were not the man she was seeking for—seeking for with this dagger in her hand?"

The sergeant drew the dagger from his pocket and held it towards Stephen.

Stephen remembered the letter that Chipchase had brought him, and understood. He made an attempt to appear calm, to give his voice the ring of truth, but he failed utterly. He stammered out a broken sentence and stopped. Sergeant Verity came towards him, and taking him by the shoulder, looked steadily in his face.

At that moment the fire blazed up, and the dancing flames lit up the room.

"You are not Clement Hansell!" cried the sergeant; "you are not John, but Stephen Alison!"

The ex-convict bowed his head. "Yes," he said, "I am—what are you going to do with me?"

"Arrest you!" exclaimed Verity. "I promised, when I came here to receive information, that I would not reveal the identity of my informer unless he was an accomplice in the crime. The charge against you, Stephen Alison, is that you are the actual murderer of Lord Charlton. You are my prisoner."

"Will you listen to me?" asked Stephen, recovering himself. "You have always been my friend. You know my story—you pitied me in the old days—pity me, and help me now!"

"Help a suspected murderer to escape from justice!—I, an officer——"

"I do not want you to help me to escape—I want to help you to find those who are really guilty."

"I cannot listen to you—I must do my duty. You must prove to the law that you are innocent."

"If I am arrested I cannot prove it. I should have given myself up at the time, but that I saw how black everything was against me. Come, sergeant—think—if you are here—if I am in your power—if you know my secret—I have brought it on myself—*it was I who sent for you to come to me.*"

The sergeant hesitated. "That is true," he said, "but——"

He was still bewildered. Stephen Alison had been found dead—Stephen Alison had been buried, and yet he was here alive and living the life of a millionaire.

In his bewilderment he forgot for a moment that the

man he was talking to was the suspected murderer. He questioned him eagerly.

"Who was it we found in your room?"

"My twin brother, John Alison—he came to see me—he died of heart disease—I took his clothes and dressed him in mine. He had told me that no one in England knew him—that he was taking possession of this house, where none of the servants knew him, that night. He told me that he had atoned for the wrong he did me by leaving me all he possessed. When he fell back dead in my room everything belonging to him was mine by right. I left John Alison dead as Stephen Alison in my room—I came here as Clement Hansell and took possession of that which was mine by right."

The sergeant listened as a man in a dream. He could hardly realise the situation, yet his own senses told him the man must be speaking the truth.

Stephen saw that the sergeant was bewildered, and continued his narrative rapidly. He explained how everything had happened. He explained the plot that Darvell had unfolded to him, and how he had consented to go with Lord Charlton, not to murder him, but to save him from the villainous scheme of which he was the object. He told the story of his late visit to the Earl of Powick's, and his utter ignorance of what had happened after he left, until he read the terrible news in the evening paper.

When he had finished, the sergeant was assured of his innocence. He was convinced that Stephen, hoping to pass himself off as John Alison, had risked this meeting in order to place him (the sergeant) in possession of all the facts.

When Stephen told him of the suggestion the Duke had made to him that night in Piccadilly, repeating the exact words, he had no longer any doubt as to who the murderer was. The Duke and an accomplice had got into the house after Stephen left, had been interrupted by Lord Charlton as they were in the act of stealing the jewels from the safe, and had killed him.

The mystery was now clear as noonday to the sergeant, and he knew that Gannett had been justified in the theory he had built round the missing brandy-flask.

His heart went out to the man for whom he had always felt a keen sympathy. He ought to have arrested him there and then. He knew that was his duty. But in his desire to support his own theory and prove it triumphantly, as well as in his heartfelt wish to save Stephen from being dragged back again to the miserable life from which he had escaped, he made up his mind to risk everything and for the present keep the secret that had been revealed to him.

And if he was going to fathom the mystery, to bring the guilty to justice, it would be through Stephen's information. That was a salve to his conscience. He was going to do a desperate thing; but he was going to do it to save the innocent, not to save the guilty.

His one difficulty was, how was he to prove Darvell's villainy without the evidence of Stephen Alison? How was he to prove it at all without implicating Stephen? If Darvell were arrested, it would have to be on the charge that he conspired with Stephen to have Charlton murdered. Nobody could give evidence that Stephen Alison never intended to commit the crime.

But the first thing was to prove that Stephen was guiltless of the actual murder. "That," said Stephen, when he found that Verity was willing to risk everything for his sake, "is the one thing that I hope and pray for. Whatever happens to me, let this terrible shadow be lifted from my innocent wife and child."

The two men sat together till nearly midnight. Eventually the sergeant agreed upon his plan. He must take Gannett off the track of the mysterious visitor to the room in Exton Street, and get him to concentrate himself upon bringing the burglary and the murder home to the Duke. If that could be done the rest of the sergeant's task would be considerably simplified.

But how—how was it all to be done without bringing Stephen into it?

CHAPTER XLV

THE TRIUMPH OF SERGEANT GANNETT

JACK GANNETT was following his clue, and was elated at the way in which he was piecing his evidence together. He was certain that there had been a visitor at Exton Street on the night that the ex-convict died suddenly of heart disease, and he believed that this visitor, if found, might be able to give important information. At any rate, it would be a feather in his cap to find him.

He had ascertained that Stephen had a twin brother who was almost his counterpart. The evidence of Weston proved that such a person had been inquiring for Stephen and had obtained his address.

The house had been empty that night, so that no inmate could say if such a person had called and asked for Stephen.

Sergeant Gannett had made inquiries in the neighbourhood, but no one had seen such a person about on the evening in question. In the course of his inquiries from house to house and shop to shop, a young lady, given to standing on the doorstep of her mother's residence and taking the evening air, who had been interviewed, informed Lobelia of the questions that the detective had put to her.

"That detective chap's been on to me, Lobelia, about your aunt's murderer," she said, "and he's been asking me if I saw a gent very like the murderer a 'anging about outside the 'ouse. Don't I wish I had just—I should ha' been in the papers then p'raps, like you."

Lobelia tossed her head and thought it was like this young person's impudence to imagine that she could thrill the British public after the Lobelian manner; but she was at the same time hurt to think that after her brilliant triumph in the Press anybody else should be consulted by the authorities.

The next morning, at breakfast, she mentioned the matter to Jim, who on the strength of Clement Hansell's

fifty pounds was getting together the furniture with which to start housekeeping when he led Miss Jones to what Lobelia called the "highmenial" altar, as though it were a tall footman, and was trying to make up his mind between a magnificent dining-room suite in "morocco," at eight pounds fifteen, and a "drawing-room suite in walnut and green rep" at a slightly lower figure.

"What's that you're talking about, Lobelia?" he said; "somebody like our lodger a-hanging about that night—*like* our lodger, did you say?"

"Yes—that's what the tecs are asking about now," answered Lobelia.

Jim put his thumb into the armholes of his waistcoat and stared at his father.

"That's rum, guv'nor," he said. "You remember what I told you—when I took that letter back?"

"No," groaned Sam, who really was bad with the rheumatics this time. "No, Jim, I don't remember nothing, and if your bones ached like mine you wouldn't neither. The rheumatiz don't give me no time for remembering nothing except that I aches all over, and I ain't never likely to forget that."

"I remember what you said the evening you brought your young lady to tea, Jim," said Lobelia, who had gradually softened to Miss Jones, and had been considerably mollified by Jim promising her that she should be *his* bridesmaid the day "as father gave him away"; "you said as the gent you took the letter to was like our lodger, poor Mr. Alison."

Jim nodded his head. He might have said something, but his mother stopped all further conversation on the subject by declaring that she wouldn't have the subject brought up again at any table of hers. They didn't want any more disgrace brought on a respectable house, and if they wanted to talk about the murderer they could go into the back yard and do it—*she* wasn't going to sit and listen to it.

Jim took the hint and said no more in the family circle, but when he went to the cab-yard to fetch his hansom he argued matters out with himself.

If the police were making inquiries he ought hardly to keep a matter like that to himself. He was going

to get married, and he had a strong idea that when you are going to be married you ought to be extra careful in your worldly behaviour. After you are married it don't matter so much, but on the eve of matrimony even a hansom cabman should take Cæsar's wife as his model.

He had heard the gossip of the public-house and the neighbourhood, that Sergeant Gannett of Scotland Yard was making inquiries, and so he drove his cab into the Yard and left it in charge of a policeman while he went and looked for the sergeant.

Presently the sergeant came, and Jim, apologising for coming with what might be after all "nothing to do with anything," told the story of the fare he drove to the City, the letter that was left in the cab, and its restoration. He didn't say what the contents of the letter were, because he felt that, having received fifty pounds for restoring it, it would not be honourable to "give the show away." But he told the sergeant that the letter was addressed to Mr. Clement Hansell, that he had returned the letter to Mr. Clement Hansell of Grosvenor Place, whom he recognised as his fare, and that Mr. Hansell was remarkably like their late lodger, so like that he had, when it occurred to him in thinking things over, mentioned the matter to his family.

Gannett took a note of his information and thanked Jim, who departed satisfied that he had done his duty as a man about to be married.

"It's John Alison," said Gannet to himself, "there's not much doubt about that, but I don't understand about his being a millionaire and calling himself Clement Hansell. It all fits. The cabman drives a fare to —— Street, City. He walks about and appears to be looking for a building. It was in that street that Alison & Co. used to be in business. The fare leaves a letter addressed to Clement Hansell. Cabman takes it back—seeing his fare close to, he notices he's like his father's lodger, Stephen Alison. Weston describes the man who wanted Stephen Alison's address. Description fits. John and Stephen Alison were twin brothers exactly alike. There's not much doubt John Alison who went away years ago has come back a rich man, and has changed his name to Clement Hansell. He was with

his brother at Exton Street that night. Why hasn't he come forward to give evidence? Why, of course because his name's Clement Hansell now, and he'd have had to say that he was John Alison, and the brother of a convict and a murderer. Ah! that accounts for everything. It'll take him a bit aback when I ask for the honour of an interview. But I'll get Weston on the job first. I must find out when Hansell goes out, and where he goes to, and put Weston on to identify him. If he says 'That's the man,' the thing will be certain. I'll go easy. You mustn't make mistakes with millionaires. They can make things nasty for you."

. . . . . .

Sergeant Verity had thought things out during the night, and had made his plans. One fear which he had at first he had dismissed. There were two people, evidently, who had discovered that the occupant of No. — Grosvenor Place was not John Alison, *alias* Clement Hansell. They were the German woman, and the man who had been with her, but who had made off when the woman was seized. They looked like elements of danger at first, but on consideration they became harmless.

They were hardly likely to come forward under any circumstances. Their one object would be to keep out of the way of the police, for Sergeant Verity, when he seized the woman and took the dagger from her hand, told her that he was a police-officer.

He had an inquiry which took him to another part of London the first thing in the morning, so he sent a note to Gannett begging him to meet him if possible at noon —"something *particular*" was underlined in the letter.

"Well, William," said Gannett when they met, "what is it this time? Are we after a mare's nest, or on a wild-goose chase?"

"Neither, Jack, old chap. It's all solid ground I want you to go over with me this time."

"Ah—well, what I'm on's firm enough for me. What should you say if I told you I've found the man who was at Exton Street that night? Listen to this."

Gannett told his tale, and explained the process by

which he arrived at the conclusion that the visitor was the convict's brother, John Alison, and Verity threw up his hands admiringly.

"Wonderful, Jack!" he said; "you're as clever as the detectives in the shilling story-books; if you're right, you've got the very man we shall want. But I've got a big thing too; and I want you to be in it. I've got the straight tip that we can take the Duke for the job, and I'm going to do it to-night. It'll be rough work, for he's a desperate ruffian; but you'd like to be in it. You take it from me, Jack, if we get him, we've got the murderer of Lord Charlton. It will be a big sensation, and the papers will be full of it. We're old pals, and I want you to stand in it with me."

"You're a good chap, William, but I want to follow up the John Alison clue at once."

"Let's get the Duke first."

"Very well. When do we go?"

"To-night. There's something up. He's been meeting Joe Huggett. I got the tip by chance this morning, and I know where they are going to meet to-night. It's a nasty neighbourhood, and we shall want a couple of men with us that we can leave somewhere handy. We shall have to get up as roughs to get through."

"How have you got your tip, William?"

"I put Kate Flynn on to the job. She's managed it splendidly. She'll work with us to-night. Meet me at six this evening."

"All right."

"And don't move in *any other direction* till this job is through, or else we may give ourselves away. You understand?"

"Yes, William—I understand—six o'clock."

"Right—and as I've taken you into this, I'll come into the John Alison job with you. That's fair, isn't it?"

"That's fair—quite fair, William."

The two men parted, and Sergeant Verity looked after his mate with a wicked little look in his eye.

"You've played into my hands beautifully, Jack," he said. "You've made up your mind that Clement Hansell is John Alison, and John Alison he can remain for the rest of his life."

CHAPTER XLVI

THE QUIETING OF JOE HUGGETT

Mr. Ben Gooch, of the "Wheel of Fortune," smoked his cigar behind the grimy counter of his poverty-stricken-looking public-house, and attended to his business with the air of a man who is satisfied with life as it is and has no ambitions. His customers who knew him reckoned that he was a rich man and had "prop'ty," and that he could have retired from business and "gone racing" if he chose.

Mr. Ben Gooch could have done a good many things had he chosen. But he preferred to remain where he was. He had had more than one good thing brought to him since he had been at the "Wheel of Fortune," for his acquaintance lay among some of the cleverest of the criminal classes, but he had never done so well out of anything as he had done in his deal with the Duke.

Within a few hours of the burglary at Grosvenor Place the Countess of Powick's jewellery had been deposited in a safe place in the beer-cellar of the "Wheel of Fortune," and after being "broken up" it had been conveyed thence by trusty hands to the Continent, where it had been disposed of in the usual manner. There is a good deal of "cutting-up" in a job of this sort. The value of stolen jewellery is very much below market price on account of the danger and difficulties attending the process of turning it into money, and the risk the purchaser runs of finding himself in the dock on a charge of "receiving with knowledge."

The tradesman who, in the ordinary way of business, buys goods of a stranger at considerably below their value, has an unpleasant quarter of an hour when the hand of Fate brings him into the witness-box, and no legitimate diamond merchant will deal in stones with the class of men who have the proceeds of a jewel robbery to turn into ready money as speedily as possible.

Neither the Duke nor Joe Huggett was satisfied with

his share of the plunder. If they had obtained it without risking the gallows, they might have grumbled less. But the murder of Lord Charlton had, in their calculation, entitled them to higher compensation for their night's work.

Penal servitude was one thing, hanging was another. After a job like the Powick burglary, which had startled England and put the police on their mettle, the two cracksmen knew that they would have to rest from their professional labours for some time to come. Any suspicious movement on their part would give the police an opportunity of arresting them, and if they were caught in a criminal act there were always chances of something turning up to bring the Grosvenor Place crime home to them.

The Duke, who was a clever and cunning ruffian, bore his disappointment with outward calm. He guessed that for some time to come he would share with other "old lags" the attentions of Scotland Yard. So he pocketed his "bit," and smoked his pipe at home, and cultivated the domestic virtues, much to the astonishment of his wife, who wondered why business no longer took him abroad at night or kept him from home for days together.

But Joe Huggett was not cast in such a philosophical mould. It was the biggest job he had ever been in. He had made himself party to a murder, and he had received about a fourth of what he considered his just due.

Joe's anger was not against the Duke—he looked upon him as a fellow-sufferer. His wrath was all for the landlord of the "Wheel of Fortune," whom he denounced in lurid language as a thief of the worst description. He believed that Ben Gooch had lied as to the amount which the jewellery had realised, and had kept the lion's share of the proceeds for himself.

In his indignation he had not hesitated to inform the landlord of his views, and one evening when he had drunk a considerable quantity of the liquor supplied by Mr. Gooch to his customers, and the little bar was empty, he relieved his over-strained feelings by telling Mr. Gooch that he'd be even with him yet.

When Joe Huggett had slept off the effects of the

"Wheel of Fortune" refreshment, the indiscretion of the previous evening had passed from his memory. But it had not been forgotten by the landlord, who carefully refrained from quenching his thirst with the stuff he kept for his customers.

To say that Mr. Gooch was alarmed would be incorrect. Fear did not enter into his composition. If it had, he would have been unable to do business with such men as the Duke and Joe Huggett.

But he recognised that the man who gets drunk and threatens his accomplices is an element of danger, and he took the first opportunity of letting the Duke know that Huggett was "getting drunk and talking," and it was agreed that Huggett had better be "quieted."

The Duke, who was anxious about his own neck, saw the necessity instantly, and laid his plans at once.

He met Joe one night and made an appointment for the following evening at the room in the tenement house in the Mint. The Duke informed his "pal" that he had a safe job on for that evening. There was no risk. An old man, a miser, was living alone in a secluded house in a lane near 'Ighgate Woods. There was a lot of money on the premises, for the old chap didn't believe in banks, and had his money about the place. Through a charwoman who went in the daytime the Duke had found out the old man's hiding-place. All they had to do would be to get in and take it.

"It's cash?" said Joe. "No jewellery this time, eh? —no Ben Gooches in it?"

"Nobody but our two selves, mate, and the stuff's all in Jimmy o' Goblins and flimsies" (sovereigns and banknotes). "Meet me at my crib to-morrow at seven, and we'll get the tools and be at 'Ighgate by ten, and have plenty of time to get in nice and quiet."

The Duke knew Highgate Woods, and he knew the chance he would have of taking his "pal" unawares there and quieting him without fear of interruption.

But he was bound to have the "tools" with them, or Joe would be suspicious. He didn't want to carry them himself, because it is always as well, in case of an awkward rencontre with a member of the force who "knows you," *not* to have the implements of your profession on

your person. The Duke made it a rule to let his pal r that risk whenever he could, and by keeping apart un the scene of operation was reached he reduced his ow risk to a minimum.

That was why he arranged they should make his "crib their rendezvous.

But there was one thing in his desire to make himse safe that the Duke had left out of his calculation.

While he was making the appointment with Joe in quiet side street near the "Wheel of Fortune," a drunke woman who had been loitering about passed him, an staggering leant against the wall for a moment for suppor

It was just as the Duke was telling Joe where to mee him.

The men parted, and the drunken woman staggered o till she reached the top of the street. Then she dive into a court, and came out into the main thoroughfare where she met a man who was leaning against a pos smoking his pipe.

She said a few words to him and passed on. The ma stayed for a minute or two, then knocking the ashes ou of his pipe strolled off.

Half-an-hour later he had made his report to Sergean Verity.

. . . . . .

In the pitch darkness of the slum where the Duke had taken an apartment, two rough-looking men were standing at a doorway, talking to a slatternly-looking woman who had moved her "sticks" into a room that morning. They called each other by their Christian names, and if you had been interested in their conversation you would have gathered that her husband had been "pinched," and these were his pals who were going to try and find the money among his "mob" to get a lawyer to defend him.

The men called each other Jack and Bill and the woman Sal.

"What sort of a place have you got, Sal?" said Bill, as a tenant slouched down the court and pushed the woman roughly aside.

"Oh, not bad—right up top—catches my bref a bit wif my asma. You'd better come up and I'll give you

Mike's character, wot he got his last place on, to show that he's a respectable carman out o' work."

"All right, Sal, presently," said Bill. "'Ere, you're a blockin' up the doreway."

Sal moved aside as two men came to the doorway and passed in, and went heavily up the stairs.

The three kept up the conversation about Mike, the victim of justice, until the sound of the men's footsteps died away. Then Bill said, under his voice—

"Wait a minute, Jack, and then we'll go up."

Jack put his hand in a hip-pocket. It was only habit. He wanted to see that his revolver was there.

Then, the woman leading the way, the men followed her to the top floor of the tenement house.

The woman opened the door on a dark landing, and the men entered her room. For a moment the three kept silence.

Then Bill quietly slipped his boots off, and Jack imitated his example. The woman silently pointed to a portion of the lath-and-plaster partition which divided her room from her neighbour's.

A portion of the wall, about the size of a man's hand, had been scraped away, and a small gimlet-hole had been bored through. Bill dropped on his knees and put his eye to the tiny aperture.

He got up and came to his mate. "I can't see," he whispered. "Hush!"

There was the sound of voices speaking low in the next room.

"I can't hear," said Jack; "we shall have to try the door."

The men crept out of the room, and looked at the other door on the landing.

It was closed, but the rays of light shining below it showed that there was a space between the bottom of the door and the flooring.

Bill lay quietly down on his face and listened. Jack crept to the head of the stairs. If any one came up he would hear them at once.

The woman remained in her room with the door open.

She had taken from her pocket two pairs of handcuffs, and was trying the snaps.

CHAPTER XLVII

MARION ALISON

CAPTAIN HALFORD, when he returned home, was in a st[a]
of excitement and perturbation which he was unable
control.

He saw Cecil and told him the extraordinary discov[e]
which he had made, and of the result of that intervi[ew]
the reader is already aware.

Captain Halford had obeyed John Alison's request, b[ut]
he was haunted by the feeling that he was making hi[m]self a party to a deceit.

He felt that to go straight to the police and tell th[em]
the story that John Alison had told him was the cou[rse]
he ought as an honourable man to pursue.

But he was afraid of making a false move. He realis[ed]
the truth of what John Alison had urged, that on t[he]
bare word of a relative, who was naturally interested
clearing the dead man's memory, public opinion w[as]
hardly likely to be altered.

No, he must give John the opportunity he had plead[ed]
for, the opportunity of getting the confirmation
Stephen's story, which he declared he could do if t[he]
Captain respected his secret and sent his son to him.

What Cecil could do in the matter was a myste[ry]
which he was unable to fathom. In his interview wi[th]
his son he asked the question, and Cecil had answere[d]
quite truthfully that he did not know.

Shortly after Cecil had heard his father's story and le[ft]
to call upon the man whose identity had now been r[e]vealed, the Captain went to the room where May and h[er]
mother were sitting.

May had lost her colour, and her face was carewor[n]
but when her uncle entered she made an effort to smil[e]
and something of her old vivacity returned as she told th[e]
Captain that the doctor had been, and had said that h[er]
mother was gaining strength every day, and that no[w]
she might go out. The air would do her all the good i[n]
the world.

"I've been trying to persuade mother to go out for a little walk," she said, "but she won't. You must try and persuade her, uncle."

"I can't, Richard," moaned Mrs. Alison, "I can't—I feel as if I could never go out or let a stranger see me again. If any one were to recognise me—I should be pointed out—they would say, 'That is the wife of——' O Richard, it is terrible! Can't we go away—out of England—anywhere—anywhere where our shame will be unknown?"

"My poor Marion!" said the Captain quietly, "we cannot do that—at least not yet. Heaven knows I want to spare you all the pain I can, but we can't leave England—my affairs demand that I shall remain here for a time."

"It is cruel, cruel!" exclaimed Marion Alison, the tears filling her eyes. "I am powerless—I can do nothing; and as I believe in Heaven I believe that Stephen was innocent!"

The Captain hesitated. Ought he to tell his sister that John Alison was in London—that John Alison had seen Stephen on the night of his death, and declared that from his brother's own lips he had heard a story which cleared him of all share in the crime?

Yes; at least it would give her a ray of hope.

"May," he said, "I quite understand why your mother doesn't care to go out yet. But you must get out, my child—go now—go into the air for a little while. We shall be having you break down next."

May rose and kissed her mother tenderly. She wanted to go. She was a country girl, and she wanted to breathe the air—to feel the sky above her again. She had been for days and days within four walls, and she pined for the fresh air as a gipsy in a house pines for green turf and the blue sky.

"I'll go for a little while," she said, "but I shall come back very soon, mother—very soon."

When May had gone the Captain drew his chair closer to the sofa on which his sister was lying.

"I have something to tell you, Marion," he said, "something which may bring you hope."

"Ah—tell me then—tell me quickly!"

"Patience, dear—and don't build too much on wha I am going to say—I have only the word of one man, an he is a man who has been our worst enemy."

"What do you mean?"

"I have seen John Alison."

"John—he is here in London?"

"Yes, he has come to England a wealthy man. H has come back bearing another name, but that he ha made a huge fortune abroad there is no doubt at all."

"But you said you could give me hope. What ca John Alison do? Ah, you mean with his money he——

"No. He has been back for some time. On th night that Stephen died John was with him."

With him?"

"Yes—so he says—and he has no reason to lie abou that."

"He was with my poor Stephen—and he went awa and remained silent? Oh, what does it mean?"

"It means that John Alison was too cowardly to com into a court of justice and reveal himself. But he say that Stephen, when he heard of the discovery of Lor Charlton's body, told him everything—told him enoug to prove that he was an innocent man."

"Ah, then, the world must know that! John Aliso must be made to speak. Brother, you will make him You will write to the papers—you will go to th police?"

"Hush, Marion. I will do all that I can, but at prese we have only John's statement—without proof, that migh be worth nothing. People would say, 'He says this t clear his brother's memory. It is a tale.'"

"Yes, yes, I see that; but what proof can he giv us?"

"He says he learnt enough from Stephen to enab him to give information which will lead to the discove of the real criminal."

"Ah—if that could be done!"

"He swears it can be. I am doing my best to assi him. Marion, there is hope in this—a little hope—b you must not count on it too much."

"But he *knows* that Stephen was innocent!" exclaime Marion Alison; "he heard it from his own lips—he—

Ah, brother, I must see John at once—I must! He heard my husband's last words—he must repeat them to me—to me!"

"Marion, you must not!"

"Yes, yes, I must. Ah, let me see him—I will plead to him—I will implore him—I will force him to do my husband's memory this justice. He wronged him living—he shall not wrong him dead. Tell me where he is!"

"No, no!"

"Yes. Ah, if you won't take me, I will go to the police myself; they shall find him for me. If *you* will not take me to him, *they* shall!"

The Captain hesitated. "You must not go to-day, dear; you are not strong enough. Wait, now; we may have news by to-morrow."

"Well, I will wait; but if I hear nothing to-morrow, then I shall go—promise me I shall?"

The Captain felt that he could not refuse.

"Yes, Marion," he said, "to-morrow you shall see John Alison."

. . . . . .

The morning after the visit of Sergeant Verity, Stephen rose late. He had scarcely slept, except for a few minutes, all night.

Now that he had revealed himself, now that the fact that he—the suspected murderer of Lord Charlton—was known to a Scotland Yard detective, he realised the risk that he had run in confessing the truth.

He closed his eyes, and he saw himself arrested and brought before a judge. He heard the counsel for the prosecution state the case against him, and the proof of his guilt seemed convincing.

He roused himself and sat up and tried to shake the feeling of terror off, but it would not be dismissed.

He felt that he had given himself into the hands of those who would sooner or later put him in the felon's dock. What could he prove, after all?

He lay till nearly ten o'clock—thinking—thinking—thinking. It was nearly eleven when he went downstairs and found Dennis Avory in the library.

Dennis brought him a pile of letters to glance through

—the usual letters that a rich man receives from strangers. Stephen thrust them aside angrily.

Avory saw that his employer was out of sorts, and proposed that they should go out. It was a fine, bright morning, and Mr. Hansell looked as though he wanted a tonic.

"No, Avory," said Mr. Hansell, "I won't go out to-day—I'm not quite myself. Leave me alone this morning—come to me again this afternoon."

The young man took his leave, and Stephen fell into a moody reverie. He wondered what Verity was doing. Would he keep his word? Would his courage desert him at the last moment, and fear of the consequences compel him to go to the authorities, and say that the South African millionaire, Mr. Clement Hansell, was Stephen Alison, the suspected murderer of Lord Charlton?

He had always thought his library was a quiet room shut off from the sounds of the house until this morning. Now he could hear everything—every ring at the bell—every knock at the door.

Every time he heard the latter he listened, and a great fear took possession of him. When the servant came into the room he looked over his shoulder—he expected to see an officer of justice behind him.

The morning wore away. He sat in an easy-chair and crouched by the fire. Luncheon had been laid for him, but he declined to sit down to it. He couldn't eat. He couldn't read. He could only think—and thinking maddened him.

About three o'clock, tired out with want of rest, he closed his eyes, and fell into a doze in the easy-chair by the fire.

He awoke with a start as the servant entered the room and said that Captain Halford wished to see him.

Stephen rose almost with a cry of joy. It was a relief to him to have some one to whom he could speak about the matter that was troubling him.

The door opened again and Captain Halford entered. But there was a lady with him, dressed in deep mourning and closely veiled.

Before Stephen had uttered a word the lady had come towards him.

"John Alison," she began; then lifting her eyes to the face of the man who stood paralysed before her, she uttered a cry and tottered into his outstretched arms.

"Stephen!" she cried—"Stephen!—my husband!"

Dennis Avory, who had come into the room thinking Mr. Alison was alone, heard the cry and the words, and he and the Captain looked at each other in mute amazement.

Marion Alison lay in a dead faint in her husband's arms.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE CAPTURE

The Duke, in renting the apartment in the Mint which he facetiously called his "business premises," had chosen his locality with a full knowledge of its many advantages. The inhabitants of the slum were not at all particular as to the occupation of their neighbours, and had one common enemy—the policeman. They were not all criminals, but those who had not actually embarked in crime as a profession looked upon it merely as a way of earning a livelihood. The man who smoked haddocks or dressed rabbit-skins or followed the trade of a street-hawker got his living one way; the thief and the house-breaker got theirs another. It is not considered etiquette in certain neighbourhoods to criticise your neighbour's method of getting the wherewithal to obtain food and shelter.

Several of the inhabitants were known to be thieves, and talked openly of their profession. Those who had "done time" were rather proud of it. It put them on a pedestal above the beginners and amateurs who had not had any experience of Her Majesty's gaols.

There was another great advantage in the situation of the Duke's business premises, and that was the strong objection of the uniformed police to include this slum on their beat. There were occasionally free fights among the inhabitants, and women's hysterical voices constantly

shrieked "Police!" more as a matter of habit, it is true, than anything else. But the passing policeman who heard the summons strode stolidly on his way. He knew that any attempt on his part to interfere with either one side or the other would be the signal for both sides to make common cause against him. And in the gloom which shrouded the doings of the inhabitants in mystery there was not the slightest chance of identifying your assailants.

There are scores of localities in the great city which the police never enter unless in twos or threes, and for a special purpose. To go alone would be as foolhardy as for a solitary sailor to land on a cannibal island.

The Duke, knowing the safe ground he was on, conducted his "business" without the ordinary precautions. He and Joe Huggett, once in their room, conversed freely about their plans, and did not trouble about the other tenants. In one of these houses a year or two back a man was murdered. One of the witnesses at the trial, a woman, said that in the night she heard a fight, and a man call "Murder!" and afterwards she heard somebody groaning.

"Why didn't you raise an alarm, or go and see what was the matter?" asked the judge.

"Why didn't I?" replied the woman; "it wasn't no business of mine what the other people in the house did."

On the present occasion the Duke purposely bragged of the soft job that lay in front of them. He was anxious to put Joe Huggett quite at his ease, for Joe was still slightly nervous as to the advisability of "doing business" while the police were still warm over the Grosvenor Place affair.

"I tell you, Joe," said the Duke, as he drew his housebreaking implements from their hiding-place, "it's a reg'lar Bank 'Olerday for us—a kid could do it."

"That's all right, Dook," replied Joe, "but you're sure as we shall find 'ready' in the place, or stuff as we can get rid of without taking a 'fence' into it?"

"Certain, Joe. I wouldn't have put the job to you if it hadn't been a walk-over. You ain't funking it, are you?"

"No, I ain't funking the job, but I wouldn't have a hand in pinching a teaspoon if I thought as Ben Gooch was going to get anything out of it. He's a swindling thief!"

"Oh, he's all right, Joe. You've got your knife into him."

"Knife into him! I wish I had. I'll tell you what I'd like to do, Dook, if you're game."

"I'm game for anything. What is it?"

"Well, it's a fiver to a farden he's got no end o' swag in them barrels of his you say he keeps in a cellar by themselves. Dook, I'd like to get into that cellar one night—it wouldn't be a hard job, and he daren't open his mouth, not even if he tumbled to who'd done it. Now, that 'ud be a soft job if you like."

"That's not bad, Joe—we'll have a talk about that bime-by. But we'll have to start for 'Ighgate pretty soon—Ben Gooch'll keep."

"Yes, he'll keep—but I'll do it. If you won't I'll get somebody else to go in with me. He robbed us over the Charlton business, the sweep, and I ain't going to let a fat, lazy beast like that, as was snorin' on his back while we was putting our necks in the rope, get the best o' me. I'll——What's that?"

With a hoarse cry, the Duke sprang to his feet and gripped the short crowbar that was lying on the ground.

A tremendous crash had been dealt at the locked door from outside. It fell back on its weak hinges, and two men, with revolvers in their hands, sprang into the room.

"Drop that," shouted the first man to the Duke, "or I'll put a bullet through you. We're police-officers, and we arrest you for the murder of Lord Charlton!"

The Duke, with a fierce oath, sprang on Huggett and seized him by the throat.

"You've done this, you skunk!" he shouted. "You've turned coppers' nark!"

In his blind rage and bewilderment, the one idea that came to him was that Joe's "talking" had put the police on his track.

Sergeant Verity covered the burly ruffian with his

revolver, as Jack Gannett sprang in to seize him. But before Gannett could reach him the Duke had aimed a violent blow at Huggett with the crowbar and felled him like an ox.

Instantly Verity rushed in, and he and Gannett seized the struggling ruffian by the arms and pinioned him. The slatternly woman who had stood at the open doorway entered, and when the two sergeants forced the Duke's hands in front of him she slipped the handcuffs on his wrists.

The Duke, who, in his blind fury, had till then taken little notice of any one but Huggett, looked in the men's faces and recognised them.

"It's a fair cop," he said; "but if it hadn't been for this hound I'd have stretched *one* of you out."

He glanced contemptuously at the prostrate form of his accomplice. "Looks like I've outed him," he said. "Good job if I have—he'll never blab again."

The woman looked at the two detectives for orders.

"You can go and get the men now," said Verity. "We'll keep him from shouting."

"If he opens his mouth I'll brain him," said Gannett.

The ruffian, seeing that he was powerless, and that any attempt to shout and urge the people of the slum to rescue him would lead to a cracked skull, held his peace and dropped into a rickety chair.

There is nothing a ruffian of the Duke's type objects to so much as physical pain. Men of his stamp, who will go with a swaggering gait to the gallows, will whine for mercy at the first blow of the "cat."

"Now, mate," said Sergeant Verity, "you'd best come along quietly. We've got a couple of officers waiting and they'll be here directly, and we shall walk you down and out into the street, and then you shall have a cab ride and it won't cost you a farthing. But if you shout or attempt to give a signal of any kind till we're clear of here—we shall give you a taste of lead."

The sergeant put his revolver playfully to the Duke's head just to emphasise the fact that he was in earnest on his prisoner's mind.

Having thus induced him to take a philosophic view of the situation, Verity left the Duke to be looked after by Gannett, and knelt down by Joe Huggett.

"He's cracked his skull, Jack," he said. "We'll have to get him to the hospital quick."

There was the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Two officers in plain clothes followed the woman up into the room. In the court below there was a murmur of men and women.

"They've spotted us," said one of the men, "but there aren't many of 'em about. The cab's at the top of the court, and I've put the constable on duty to watch it."

"You'd better pick up this chap," said Gannett, pointing to Joe, who was breathing heavily and quite insensible. "We'll drop him at the hospital first."

Gannett and Verity took the Duke by the arms, again advising him to come quietly if he wanted to be put into the cab alive. Then they led him down the stairs, the woman walking close at their heels. The two plain clothes men, carrying Joe Huggett between them, followed.

At the foot of the stairs three or four ruffianly-looking men barred the passage.

If there had been a chance of a rescue the officers would have had a bad time.

But the sergeants knew what they had to expect, and made a little public display of their revolvers.

"Stand away there, my lads," said Verity cheerfully. "There's half-a-dozen of our chaps handy, and you won't do any good."

The men recognised the truth of the remark, and, the Duke being a comparative stranger, they stepped sullenly aside, and the little procession passed out into the court.

The women began to hoot and jeer and yell. One of them flung a brickbat, but as it struck the Duke and neither of the officers, the former turned on them with a savage growl.

The officers behind, carrying their burden, had a harder task. But when the women saw that the man they were carrying looked as if he were dead, and the men called out "Hospital job!" the mob drew back.

A minute later the prisoner was safe in the cab, his wounded accomplice propped up beside him.

The plain clothes men who had assisted in the removal walked rapidly into the main thoroughfare, and there took a cab to the hospital to await further instructions. The woman, who had turned very pale under the abuse and threats of the mob—they had guessed that she was a female nark (police spy), and had not spared her feelings—went away with them.

The plain clothes men arrived almost as soon as the four-wheeler, and remained guarding the cab and its occupant with Gannet, while Verity followed the hospital porters who had carried the wounded man in.

The house-surgeon who was summoned made a rapid examination, and told Verity that it was a bad case. Verity explained the circumstances, and arranged for a constable to remain in charge of Joe Huggett at the hospital.

"If he recovers consciousness we must know at *once*," said Verity; "he may want to speak."

"I think he'll do that," said the surgeon; "you'd better advise a magistrate at once."

. . . . . .

The next morning when Sergeant Verity met Jack Gannett there was a look of ill-concealed triumph in the former's manner.

"Jack," he said, "you'll have to cry second best after all. Joe Huggett's come round a bit, but he's a dying man. The magistrate has taken his deposition. He declares that he and the Duke committed the robbery alone, that there was no one else concerned in it, that it was the Duke who killed Lord Charlton, and the whole of the jewellery was taken to Ben Gooch, the 'fence,' who was arrested this morning."

"Did he say how they got into Grosvenor Place that night?" asked Gannett, with professional eagerness.

"Yes; they planned the robbery some time before, and were watching for an opportunity. That night they saw his lordship come in with a friend. After a time the friend left, and Lord Charlton stood at the open door. They throttled him at the door and forced him back into the house, then the Duke struck him down for fear he should raise an alarm. The friend must have been

Stephen Alison, and the thieves didn't recognise him. So you see I was right—Stephen Alison was an innocent man."

"You're right on that," said Gannett, holding out his hand. "My best congratulations, William. But now what about John Alison? We ought to hear what he's got to say."

"Look here, Jack," said the sergeant, "I've been a pal to you and taken you into this job, and we're going to have the credit between us. Leave John Alison to me. If he's needed I'll use him. Will you leave him to me?"

"Yes," said Gannett. "You've been a brick over the job, William, and I owe you that. John Alison is yours, to do what you like with."

CHAPTER XLIX

EXIT JACK DARVELL

STEPHEN ALISON leaped to his feet with a great cry of joy. Sergeant Verity had hastened to Grosvenor Place directly he heard of Joe Huggett's confession, and had blurted out the good news at once.

Stephen had told his wife, when she had recovered from the first shock of joy at finding him alive, everything he had done. He had reassured her to the best of his ability, when the revulsion of feeling came, and she recognised the danger to which he was exposed.

There was no atom of doubt in her mind that her husband was an innocent man, but she was terrified to think that at any moment his identity might be discovered, and that the daring scheme that he had carried out might only appear a proof of his guilt.

He soothed her by taking a cheery view of the situation. He was sure that Verity would, with the information now in his possession, run the guilty to earth.

The Captain, who after his first astonishment had become fully convinced that his brother-in-law was speak-

ing the truth, helped in every way he could to allay Marion's fears.

It was a strange and pathetic reunion between the husband and wife, who met after so long a separation. To Marion it seemed as though the dead had really come to life.

She would have remained by her husband's side, heedless of all but that he held her in his arms again; but Stephen and her brother had to point out to her that such a course would be fraught with the greatest danger. It would be to proclaim to the world that Stephen Alison was alive.

When at last the time came that she must go, she took the parting bravely, for her heart was full of gratitude and hope.

Stephen promised that after he had seen Verity he would arrange that they should meet again, and Marion Alison went out of her husband's house as a woman in a dream.

When Stephen heard the good news from the sergeant, in the first flush of his joy and relief he told him of his wife's visit.

"Now," he cried, "now that the world will know I am innocent I can go to her—I can——"

Sergeant Verity shook his head.

"Not yet, Mr. Alison," he said. "There's many things to do before you can risk that." Then he told of Gannett's discovery, and how he, Verity, thought it best that nothing should happen to upset the Gannet theory.

"And, besides," he added, "we know you're innocent, but there's the Darvell lot to settle yet. And how the dickens I'm to take him on a charge of conspiring with you, and yet prove you never conspired, I don't know. It would be a risk, you know, for you to go in the box calling yourself John Alison and tell the tale you told me about your brother's last words. And I'm afraid it wouldn't be wise for Stephen Alison to be found. I've risked a good deal to serve you, and, whether I'm doing right or wrong, I don't want you to make what I've done all of no use."

"If I confess who I am," said Stephen, "what can happen?"

"Well, you'll be in an awkward fix. You're here in Clement's Hansell's house, and spending Clement Hansell's money."

"No, it's mine. He left it me. I have the will. Everything is mine by right."

"H'm, quite so. But if you can go through without letting the world know, I should. I'm not a lawyer, but I think there might be trouble over your way of succeeding to an estate. Of course, it is yours, but it's a bit irregular—your succession—isn't it?"

Stephen saw the drift of the sergeant's argument and acknowledged its justice. He saw also that as Stephen Alison he would have great difficulty in proving that he did not accept the introduction to Lord Charlton with the idea of committing a crime from which he was only saved by the action of the Duke and Joe Huggett—that but for the burglary and its consequences he would have gone to America and made Charlton his victim.

"You are right," he sighed. "What can I do?"

"Well, stop where you are for the present, and let me see how I'm to get Darvell convicted without bringing you into it."

. . . . . .

An hour after he had left Grosvenor Place Sergeant Verity received information that Jack Darvell was making arrangements to leave the country—that he was going down to Liverpool that night, and had taken his passage to America.

The sergeant went to his superiors who had the case in hand and gave his information. But the confession of Joe Huggett had completely changed the state of affairs. The authorities hesitated. They had now proof positive that Lord Charlton's murder had absolutely no connection with the life policy. The only evidence they had to disprove Darvell's assertion that he had introduced Stephen to do him a good turn, and that Lord Charlton was aware of Alison's identity, and had consented to give a gentleman who had made one great mistake a chance of rehabilitating himself, was that of the young clerk, Bliss. And Bliss had confessed that he hated Gaygold, his employer, and wanted to "pay him back."

There were grave doubts if, on that evidence, a conviction could be secured, seeing that Lord Charlton had been murdered by burglars who had no connection with Darvell or his plans.

"Darvell and Gaygold had nothing to do with the murder," said the chief. "I think we shall have to let the rascals have a little more rope, and we shall get them on something else. We won't stop Darvell going to America, but we'll cable to the New York police, and know where to find him if we want him."

Sergeant Verity was sorry to think that such a scoundrel had slipped through his fingers, but he felt that it had saved Stephen from a critical predicament. The public, if Darvell had been charged, would have accepted the police theory. When the public learnt that the murder hod been committed by burglars they would say that the police had been on the wrong track, and that Stephen Alison had been unjustly suspected. After all, that was best.

But matters were to arrange themselves in a more satisfactory manner.

Hardly had the sergeant left the office of his chief before he was told that a lad wished to see him, and he found Master Bliss waiting in a state of great excitement.

"You've got them, Mr. Verity!" he said, "you've got them! There's a young fellow Darvell introduced to Gaygold—they got him in their clutches and he couldn't pay, and they made him do something——"

"Do what?"

"I'll tell you. He came to the office this morning, and he'd been drinking, for he went in and kicked up a row with Gaygold and threatened him, and I heard it all, though Gaygold tried to quiet him. He wanted more money, and he swore if he didn't get it he'd split. 'You and Darvell,' he said, 'made me insure my life for five thousand in a false *name*; I had to, because I was frightened of your ruining me then—but I've found out that the man whose name I took is in your hands too, and he's dying of consumption. He can't live six months. You thundering scoundrels!" he shouted—"you knew he was a dying man when you

made me insure in his name! Now I want my bit or I'll go to the police.'"

"Did Gaygold give him anything?" asked the sergeant eagerly.

"Yes—a hundred, and told him to go and drink himself to death. I've got his name and address, and I know the consumptive chap—he used to come to the office—I've written his name and address down, too."

Master Bliss handed the sergeant a little slip of paper.

"Have you got Gaygold this time?" said the lad eagerly.

"Yes, this time," replied the sergeant, "and Jack Darvell too."

The sergeant laid the matter before his chiefs instantly, and an immediate investigation was ordered. The insurance office was ascertained and communicated with, and the young man who had represented the consumptive client was arrested. He was cautioned, but made a statement which left no doubt of the conspiracy of Gaygold and Jack Darvell.

The money-lender was taken at his office, and collapsed so completely that he had almost to be carried to the cab which, out of consideration for his feelings, had been hired to convey him to the station.

As he was about to be assisted out of his office by two detectives, Master Bliss entered the room.

"You ruined my father," he said quietly," and I meant to punish you for it some day. *I've* done this for you!"

Sampson Gaygold stared at Master Bliss, horrified.

"And I thought he was such a nice boy," he screamed hysterically. "I'll never believe in an innocent face again!"

When Sergeant Verity went to Jack Darvell's residence he was shown into the dining-room (there was a man at the front door to see that Mr. Darvell didn't leave hurriedly when he heard that a gentleman was waiting to see him), and there he found Mr. Joyce.

Mr. Joyce was curious as to Sergeant Verity's business. Incidentally he volunteered the fact that his son-in-law was leaving that night for America. In the fulness of his heart Mr. Joyce further informed the visitor that Mrs.

Darvell had a brilliant touring engagement, and that the house and furniture were to be sold.

Mr. Joyce was still in the room when Darvell entered. One glance at Sergeant Verity was sufficient. Darvell knew him.

"Mr. Darvell," said the sergeant, "I have a warrant for your arrest."

"On what charge?" said Darvell, with an effort to appear calm.

"On a charge of conspiring with Sampson Gaygold" (Darvell's jaw dropped. He expected to hear the name of Lord Charlton)—"of conspiring with Sampson Gaygold," the detective continued, "to obtain an insurance on the life of William Jarrett by fraud."

Mr. Joyce flung up his hands in horror.

"My son-in-law arrested for fraud!" he exclaimed. "What a disgrace to me and my family!"

In the hall Molly Darvell met her husband.

Without a tremble of excitement in his voice he informed her that he was in custody.

The poor little woman flung her arms round his neck and sobbed. Scoundrel as he was, she loved the man she had married, and her woman's heart went out to him in the hour of his abasement.

CHAPTER L

AFTER THE STORM

Lobelia Cutts felt a flutter at her heart and a warm glow suffuse her cheek as one morning, in the little back room at the greengrocer's, 'Liza Simmons's cousin, Tom Cummings, a young man who was a railway porter at Euston, asked her if he might walk out with her.

Three years had elapsed since her memorable visit to a music-hall. Jim was married, and had a baby, who everybody said was the image of him, except Lobelia, who thought it was absurd to compare Jim to a little squalling, red-faced doll like that. Sam Chipchase had

grown more rheumatic than ever, and Mrs. Chipchase had grown more snappy, and Lobelia was anxious, as she explained to her friends, to do "something on her own."

So when the railway porter proposed Lobelia accepted him gratefully, and from that moment ceased to be a slave, and began to arrange the details of the "home" to which in due time Tom Cummings would conduct her.

Tom wasn't a bad-looking young man, and he thought Lobelia a jolly nice girl. What he liked about her was her superior way of talking.

"Sounds like reading out of a book," he said to his friends.

Lobelia took care that her young man should be impressed with the fact that she was literary, and had contributed to the Press.

At the first opportunity she produced a copy of her "interview," with portrait. The former delighted the lover; the latter made him want to go and punch the artist's head.

Looking at the interview brought up the whole story, which was now all but forgotten in Exton Street.

"Ah," said Lobelia, "it was a wonderful affair, but I always stuck to it as poor Mr. Alison was innocent. I knew he was a real gentleman by his evening dress—and not likely to murder people."

"Did they prove his innocence, then, after he was dead?" said Tom.

"Of course they did—didn't you read the papers? Why, they was full of it. It was burglars what did it. Here, when you've been introduced to aunt, and come to tea, I'll get her to let me show you the room where he was found dead."

Tom Cummings said he should like to see that, and when he armed Lobelia out the next Sunday he held his head high, for his promised bride had been the heroine of a great crime, and had championed the cause of an innocent man whom all the world believed guilty.

. . . . . .

On the terrace of a beautiful villa, the grounds of which

slope down to the shores of Lake Lugano—one of the fairest of the Italian lakes—Mr. Clement Hansell, the South African millionaire, is sitting by the side of a lady with a sweet, gentle face, who holds his hand in hers.

"Stephen," she says, as she looks up into her husband's eyes, "how happy our lives are here, dear—calm and unruffled now as the waters of the beautiful lake. Sometimes I think the past was only an evil dream."

"Hush, Marion," says her husband, gently pressing her hand. "Let it be a dream."

His eyes were fixed upon the peaceful scene before him, but his thoughts travelled far away to the days of storm and darkness, to the days when the world was ringing with his name, and he was looked upon as a dastardly murderer who had died of heart disease just in time to save him from the gallows.

He could think calmly now of all the terrors that he had endured in the days which followed his bold stroke for safety. He had never known till afterwards how near he was to discovery when Sergeant Gannett pieced the evidence together that proved that Stephen Alison had been visited by John Alison, his brother, and that John Alison was a wealthy man, living under an assumed name in Grosvenor Place.

His escape from what might have followed a visit from Sergeant Gannett he owed entirely to Sergeant Verity, who had appealed to his comrade, when all doubt as to Stephen's innocence was removed, not to drag the unfortunate family of the dead man before the public again. With the conviction of the Duke for the murder of Lord Charlton, and Ben Gooch for receiving the proceeds of the burglary, the value of Sergeant Gannett's evidence disappeared, and Darvell and Gaygold had been found guilty of a crime with which Stephen could have had nothing to do. Jack Gannett, when his comrade had pleaded that for the sake of Mrs. Alison and May, who had suffered so cruelly, the story of Stephen's brother should not be given over to the sensation-mongers of the Press, had behaved splendidly.

He had sacrificed the *éclat* which he would have won by his clever piece of detective work, and had been content to share with Sergeant Verity the credit of

capturing the Duke and successfully unravelling the Grosvenor Place mystery.

And now there was no longer any fear. Clement Hansell, the millionaire, lived on the shores of a beautiful Italian lake for many months in the year, and in the height of summer had a charming Alpine retreat. The vast fortune that was at his command he spent freely in charity. No one knew who was the periodical donor of large sums sent anonymously to the noble charities of London—no one except his secretary, who managed all his business affairs for him.

A beautiful girl comes laughing through the orange trees, followed by a young man who is carrying her sunshade and her work.

"Oh, papa, dear," she says, as she comes to Mr. Clement Hansell, "uncle's in trouble again. He's been trying to explain in Italian to our boatman that he won't have him stand up in the boat while we are on the water, and when the boatman couldn't understand him he gave us a summary of all the awful things that may happen to him through his inability to make the natives understand their own language."

Captain Halford, red faced and blue eyed, but smiling, came up in time to hear the last words.

"It's quite true, Stephen," he said, "absolutely true. May and her husband are very reckless on the water. They let that confounded Guiseppe stand up and walk about the blessed tilting, tottering thing as if it were an American liner, and when I remonstrate with the fellow he speaks some absurd gibberish or patois that is utterly incomprehensible. I shall never get on with these people. If anything happened to me I should be dead before I could explain what was the matter. I can't even ask my road home when I lose myself. I shall go too far one of these days, wandering about one of these confounded lonely roads—they're all so horribly alike I never know which way I came—and I must walk to keep my weight down—and I shall drop down by the roadside and die of slow starvation, for there are no shops in the villages. Good heavens! Stephen, I never imagined that I should end my days in a land where, if I want to send a dying message to a relative, I shall have to chalk it on a mile-

stone and hope that some English eyes may one day light upon it."

Mrs. Alison smiled. "Well, Richard dear," she said, "you'll be going to England soon, and you'll be able to make yourself understood there."

"Yes, thank goodness!" said the Captain. Then turning to Clement Hansell he added, "I've written to Cecil and asked him to try and spend some time with you, Stephen. A month's honeymoon is more than he and Jenny can possibly want to themselves, and she doesn't sing again, I believe, for some time, so they can spend a fortnight with you and Marion."

"What a success Miss Verity is," said Dennis. "It's wonderful, you know, in so short a time. I hear she sings at Queen's Hall next season, and Cecil tells me that she's getting quite wonderful terms already. How proud poor old Tom Verity must be of her."

"You knew her father, didn't you, Dennis, dear?"

"Oh yes, quite well, in the old days when I used to go racing. That was before I went to South Africa, of course."

"Ah," said Mr. Hansell, "and the sergeant too, God bless him! I owe everything to him. He believed in me from the first, he said, and he stuck to me loyally to the end, though it might have ruined him. I didn't know what I was asking him to do when I implored him to keep my secret. But he kept it, and, thank God! no one suffered through it."

"No one suffered," said Dennis, "and no one escaped. The wretched man who killed Lord Charlton paid the penalty of his crime, and those scoundrels Jack Darvell and Sampson Gaygold got their just deserts."

"And the one thing I dreaded," said Mr. Hansell, "was spared me. If my silence had prevented justice from being done, I would have come forward and gone into the open court and said that I was not Clement Hansell but Stephen Alison."

Marion Alison laid her hand gently on her husband's arm.

"There was no need to do that, dear, thank God! and there will never be any need now."

"No—never any need now; but we are happy here

where no one knows us. Our home is shut away from the world, and we want no visitors."

"And all your servants are Italians!" exclaimed the Captain, "and they're about as good-tempered and ignorant a set of men and women as it was ever my lot to meet. Why, confound it, I've been here with you for nearly a year, and there isn't one of them speaks English yet."

The Captain strode off to his favourite seat under a shady tree, and lighting a cigar, stretched himself out at his ease. From the happy husband and wife his gaze wandered to May and Dennis.

"They're as happy as the day is long," he said to himself. "Dennis Avory is a fine young fellow, and May's got a husband of a thousand. I little guessed how it was going to end that day he found me with a twisted ankle in the woods. Oh, the things that have happened since then!"

May came across to her uncle. "Uncle," she said, "I'm going to write a line to-day accepting the invitation to the wedding for Dennis and myself. Papa wishes us to go."

"Ah, that's right—I knew he would, though I can quite understand he doesn't want you to be away from him. But you'll soon be back. Bless me, the journey's nothing in these days—and it will make Cecil very happy. Poor boy, he had the idea that we shouldn't take to Jenny, because her father was a musician who didn't always sing under a ceiling, but we owe a great deal too much to the Veritys to hold our heads high over that."

"And Dennis says she's a charming girl, uncle, and now she's made quite a position for herself, you know."

"Oh yes, she could marry a marquis, and nobody would say anything, and Cecil's only a barrister."

Dennis Avory came across to his wife. "I've asked 'my governor,'" he said, with a laugh, "how long he can spare me away, and we can have a month, so we'll see some of the sights this time—you've seen so little of London."

"Yes, very little," said May, remembering the terrible trial that was associated with her only visit. "I only

went that once, and then we went back to Patterdale till papa had left England and found this beautiful home for us. I shall always love this place."

"And I, May—don't you think I shall always love it—the place where you spoke the words that made you mine for ever?"

He drew her to him gently, and pressed his lips to her smiling, upturned face.

Clement Hansell saw them and smiled.

"See, Marion," he said, "husband and wife, and tender lovers still."

"Husband and wife, and tender lovers still," she whispered, in reply, and raised her face to his.

And Stephen Alison bent low and pressed his lips to hers.

THE END

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